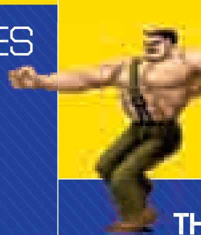
OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER

AMSTRAD | COMMODORE | SEGA | NINTENDO | ATARI | SINCLAIR | NEO-GEO | SONY | COIN-OP | MOBILE



FINAL FIGHT

THE HISTORY BEHIND CAPCOM'S BRAWLER

THE MAKING OF...

THANATOS

DISCOVER HOW A GAME ABOUT ONE GIRL AND HER DRAGON CHARMED THE 8-BIT WORLD



WWW.RETROGAMER.NET

THE DEFINITIVE...

WONDER BOY

UNTANGLING THE MOST CONVOLUTED VIDEOGAME FRANCHISE EVER MADE

25 TOP PLATFORMERS

REVEALED!

THE RESULT OF OUR READERS POLL IS FINALLY IN

BARGAIN HUNT

EVERY GAMES MACHINE LISTED

WANT TO START COLLECTING VINTAGE HARDWARE? CHECK OUT OUR COMPLETE LISTING



THE BIG INTERVIEW

DAVID CRANE

THE LEGENDARY 2600 CODER ON THE CREATION OF PITFALL II: LOST CAVERNS

THE MAKING OF...

JET SET WILLY ONLINE

HOW A BUNCH OF TALENTED BEDROOM CODERS MADE ONE OF THE GREATEST 8-BIT GAMES EVEN BETTER



THIS MONTH IN RETRO GAMER

DRAGON 32
IT'S TIME TO PAY HOMAGE TO A REAL WELSH DRAGON...

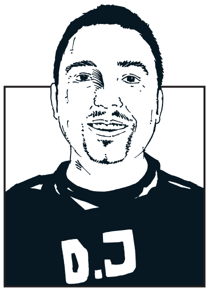
ROLLER COASTER
ROLL UP, ROLL UP. ALL THE FUN OF THE FAIR WITH THIS CLASSIC 8-BIT HIT

VIRTUA FIGHTER
HOW SEGA SHUNNED PIXELS IN ORDER TO CREATE THE ULTIMATE 3D BEAT-'EM-UP

SOLOMON'S KEY
SOLVING TECMO'S HIGHLY UNDERRATED PLATFORM/PUZZLER

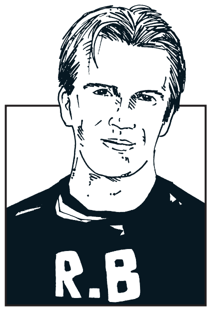
THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE PLATFORMER



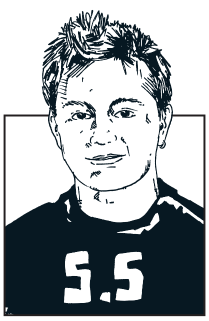
DARRAN JONES

Hmmm, this is a tricky one but for me it has to be *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*. Alright, so it's not a platformer in the conventional sense of the word, but enough of you voted for it and it's my mag, right?
Expertise: Not taking no for an answer
Currently playing:
Guitar Hero II
Favourite game of all time:
Robotron: 2084



RICHARD BURTON

Manic Miner. Not just a platform great but an all-time gaming classic. Maybe not everyone's cup of tea but for me it's a virtual comfort blanket. A big nod toward *Dynamite Dan* too…
Expertise:
Spectrum and Amstrad gaming
Currently playing:
Kid Chameleon
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner



SPANNER

Is *Skool Daze* a platformer (or is it a fifth former – tee hee!)? I reckon it probably is, and swot bashing is a great pastime for any young miscreant, so Eric gets my vote.
Expertise:
Everyfin' innit
Currently playing:
Truant
Favourite game of all time:
Er, like, woteva!



DAVID CROOKES

Super Mario World had everything: fun puzzles, good pace and enough variety to keep you going, even when you died. It also introduced Yoshi. Thank you, Nintendo.
Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Comix Zone
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



MARTYN CARROLL

No apologies for being predictable – for me it has to be *Jet Set Willy*. I'll never forget exploring the mansion as an eight year old, wide-eyed with wonderment.
Expertise: Games in which you could merge the loader
Currently playing:
MotorStorm
Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy



PAUL DRURY

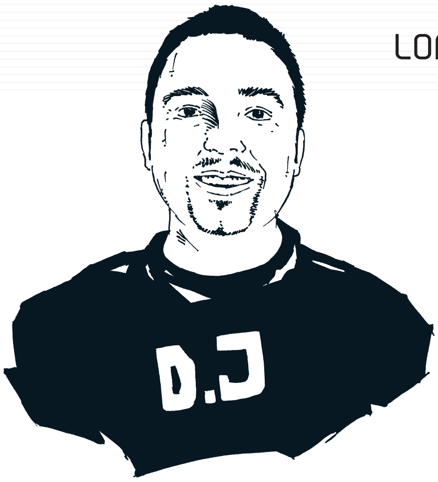
Super Mario World is probably the best and *Manic Miner* definitely gets my nostalgia vote, but as for my all-time favourite platformer I'll say *Donkey Kong*. The daddy.
Expertise: Getting programmers to confess their drug habits
Currently playing:
Juno First
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



CRAIG GRANNELL

Jumpman: it has lots of variety, dinky little characters, neat sound effects, and a jaunty rendition of Chopin's *Funeral March* when your little chap comes a cropper.
Expertise: Games you don't need 37 fingers control
Currently playing:
Virtua Tennis 2
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.

LOADING...



Platformers eh? Love them or loathe them, there's no escaping their pixel-perfect jumps and charming main characters. As a result we've gone platformer mad this month and have a variety of articles that are based around one of gaming's most popular genres.

The most obvious (well it's on the front cover) is that the results are finally in for the Greatest 25 Platformers Of All Time, and while there will no doubt be the odd shock, there's no denying that the top five places are thoroughly deserved.

If that wasn't enough, David Crane continues the story of Pitfall Harry with a fantastic making of *Pitfall II: Lost Caverns* on page 30, and we also have a brand new interview with the people in the know about the creation of *Jet Set Willy Online*. Last but by no means least is a ridiculously in-depth look at the legacy of *Wonder Boy*, easily one of gaming's most convoluted franchises.

And don't worry if you're not a fan of platformers, as you'll discover the story of the Dragon 32, the making of *Thanatos* and *Final Fight* and discover the evolution of Sega's *Virtua Fighter*. That little lot should keep you going for another month.

Enjoy the magazine.





CONTENTS

BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO CLASSIC GAMES



THE VOTES ARE IN FOR YOUR

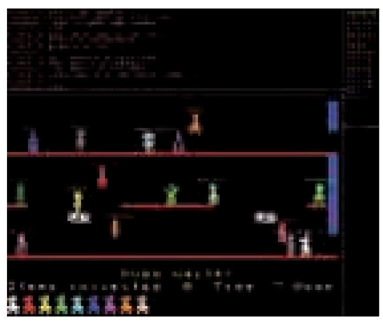
TOP 25 PLATFORMERS

FIND OUT WHAT FAMOUS DEVELOPERS THOUGHT ABOUT YOUR FAVOURITE PLATFORMERS OF YESTERYEAR

54







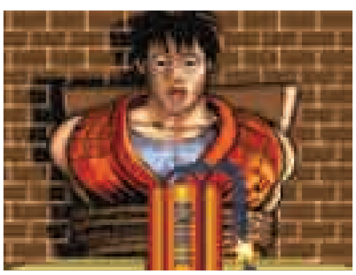
INSIDE
At-a-glance retro sections…

ESSENTIALS

DEVELOPER LOOKBACK



THE MAKING OF...



RETRORATED



THE GAMES LISTING...

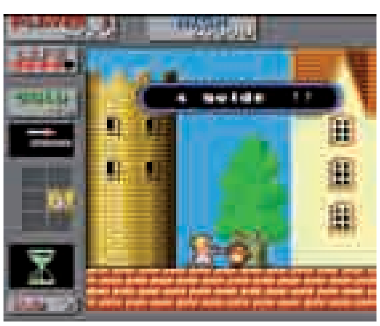
If it's a bumper compilation or a great new remake, then Retro Rated is where you'll find it



SUBSCRIBE TO RETRO GAMER

Can't stand the thought of missing the next marvellous edition of Retro Gamer? Then simply head on over to our subscriptions pages and place your order now!

p96



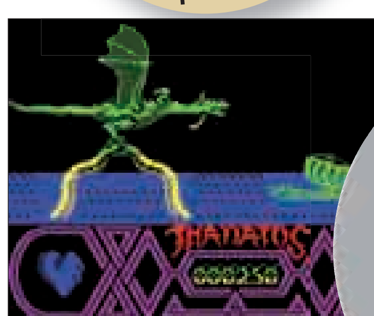
THE DEFINITIVE...

WONDER BOY



THE HISTORY OF...

VIRTUA FIGHTER



THE MAKING OF...

THANATOS

RETRO RADAR

THE GUIDE

What's hot this issue…

GOALLL! SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER WINGS ITS WAY TO LIVE ARCADE



It's arguably one of the greatest football games ever conceived and it's on its way to Xbox Live Arcade. Yay.

Hooray! It looks as though the greatest ever football franchise is heading to Xbox Live, and no, we don't mean *Pro Evolution Soccer*.

Although we've known for quite some time that Codemasters has been busily working away on a new *Sensible Soccer* title for Xbox Live Arcade, the revelation of which version of the game the Live outing would be based upon has only recently come to light. And luckily, Codemasters has seen sense and decided upon the amazing *Sensible World Of Soccer* – and what's more it's leaving the original code completely intact.

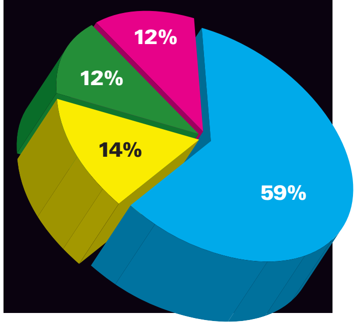
Therefore, this is going to be identical to the 1994 Amiga hit, but with the added bonus of being able to play online. Obviously, a game that's as fast-paced as *Sensi* is going to need a lot of online tweaking, but if Codemasters can sort out any lag issues, this should be incredible. Expect a release in the next few months.

HOT TOPICS

FAVOURITE ARCADE RACER

Of all the retro racers in the land, who's the fairest of them all?

OutRun **59%**
Ridge Racer **14%**
Daytona **12%**
Sega Rally **12%**



MINI HITS

KONAMI REVEALS THE LINE-UP OF ITS FIRST NINTENDO DS COMPILATION

While the Nintendo DS is home to a bevy of classic games that are either ports of old classics (*Super Mario 64 DS*) or play like old classics (*New Super Mario Bros*), actual compilations are very thin on the ground. Granted, you have got the completely inept *Atari Retro Classics* – which is so poor you should not under any circumstances accept even a free copy – but that's pretty much it.

So praise be, then, for Konami and its brand new arcade collection which has just recently gone on sale in Japan. While no UK release date has been set yet, its actual content has already had us drooling like rabid dogs for a while now. While *Konami Arcade Collection* certainly doesn't feature as many games as most of the PlayStation Portable collections out there, most of what is on offer is of a very high standard and includes the likes of *Contra, Nemesis, Scramble, Track & Field* and *Yie Ar Kung-Fu*. As well as featuring wireless play, it's also possible to turn the DS on its side to emulate the vertical monitor of titles such as *Contra* and *Scramble* – although we're not entirely sure how that affects the gameplay just yet.



Pooyan: amazingly underrated and heading to a DS near you.

Expect a review of the Japanese version in the next issue.

THE GAMES IN FULL: *Circus Charlie, Contra, Kicker, Nemesis, Pooyan, Road Fighter, Roc 'N Rope, Rush 'N Attack, Scramble, Super Basketball, Time Pilot, Track & Field, Tutankham, Twinbee, Yie Ar Kung-Fu.*

HERO OF THE MONTH



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

Every month, Retro Gamer looks at a classic videogame hero or heroine. This month it's the turn of Sonic

First appearance: *Rad Mobile*

Distinguishing features: Red Slippers

Weapon of choice: Spines. Well, he is a hedgehog

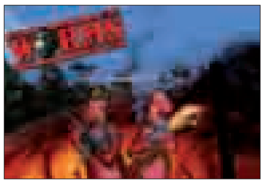
Most likely to: Constantly foil the plans of a moustachioed maniac

Least likely to: Appear in a game with Mario. Oh, hang on…

Unusual fact: Sonic has appeared in a number of cameos over the years including *Christmas NiGHTS, Bug!, Shenmue* and *Billy Hatcher And The Giant Egg*

LOADING SCREEN OF THE MONTH

NO 19: WORMS



How can you not look at the loading screen on the right and not get moist with excitement? Worms' loading screen told you everything you needed to know. There was going to be carnage, there was going to be over-the-top weapons, and, perhaps best of all, there were going to be a lot of dead worms. Brilliant stuff.

JUST IN ALTHOUGH WE PROMISED A TRIBUTE TO RICHARD JOSEPH THIS ISSUE, WE FELT IT WOULD BE BEST TO RUN IT AT A LATER DATE, SO HIS FRIENDS AND FAMILY HAVE MORE TIME TO RECOVER.

ICE CREAM! ICE CREAM!

SPEEDBALL 2 SET TO RETURN

Crikey. You wait for a fantastic online sports game to come along, and then two get announced at the same time. Codemasters may seemingly have the online football genre sewn up with the imminent arrival of *Sensible World Of Soccer* (look, it's over there on the other page) but it would appear that Frogster Interactive is hoping for the same status with its update of *Speedball 2*.

Mike Montgomery, founder of the Bitmap Brothers is onboard and along with the rest of the Kylotonn development team, is no doubt hoping to achieve the same success that he managed with the 1991 original. With the ability to play online, an enhanced version of the AGEIA physics engine in place and a worldwide ranking system, there's every chance that *Speedball 2* could become the ultimate online sports game. Let's just keep the faith that the gameplay is based on the original game and not *Speedball 2100*.



Mike Montgomoery is onboard for *Speedball 2*, let's just hope he can capture the magic of the original

ANY DREAM WILL DO

ONE OF THE SATURN'S MOST LOVED TITLES HEADS TO NINTENDO'S Wii

They've taken their sweet-ass time, but Sega has finally revealed that a new version of *NiGHTS*, perhaps one of the Saturn's greatest games, is finally on the way. While little of *NiGHTS's* gameplay has been announced, early screenshots suggest that it has already managed to capture the style of the 1996 hit. Like the recent news of Mario and Sonic teaming up though, this new announcement is something of a double-edged sword, and it already major talk on a variety of different forums and websites.

While the news of a new *NiGHTS* game is undoubtedly one of the greatest things ever, concerns are high that the original game was so amazingly good, Sonic Team (who many feel to be a shadow of its former self) will never be able to come anywhere near it, let alone surpass it.

We're all for giving Sega the benefit of the doubt, especially as we can't think of a game better suited to the Wii's controller, but we'll be crossing every part of our bodies just in case.



No official screenshots yet, so here's the glorious original instead. Just looking at it brings a tear to our eye.

THE ODD COUPLE

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG AND MARIO FINALLY JOIN FORCES

Considering that Sega's most prominent mascot started appearing on Nintendo consoles back in 2001, it's amazing to think that it's taken six years for him to join forces with perhaps the world's most famous plumber.

While the news is making our hearts flip little somersaults of joy, the actual game itself isn't quite what you imagine two of the world's biggest platforming icons to be appearing in. *Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games* will be released in December to tie-in with the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games. Due for release on both the Wii and Nintendo's DS, players will be able to participate in a variety of events including table tennis, swimming and the 100m track (surely an event Sonic will win hands down?) While Sonic and Mario are obviously the stars, other character set to be included, are Tails, Luigi, Yoshi and Knuckles.

Granted, it's not exactly what we were hoping for as a first outing, but if anyone can pull a collaboration like this off then it's going to be Sega and Nintendo.



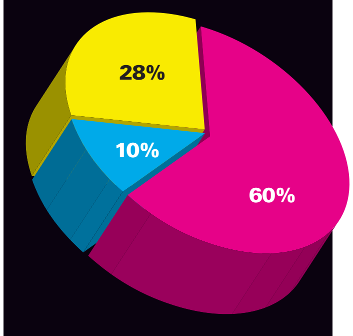
There's no pictures of Mario and Sonic's first game yet, so here's a shot of why Sonic is easily going to win the 100m dash. Look how fast he's going.

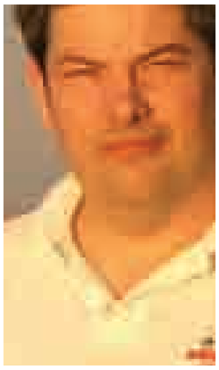
HOT TOPICS

BEST MINER WILLY GAME

Miner Willy has been around a fair bit. What's your favourite?

Manic Miner **60%**
Jet Set Willy **10%**
Jet Set Willy II **28%**







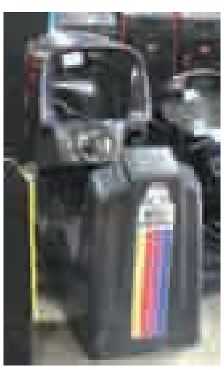
» 400 arcade cabs awaiting their fate…



» A rare Warlords cocktail. An easy restoration. Not….



» Driving games were in abundance, probably because they're not exactly easy to move.



» A *Night Driver* sit down cabinet from 1976.



» A selection of machines from the dead row.

COMMENT

HAPPY DAYS

MEMORIES FROM A USA ARCADE AUCTION

Okay, hands up. Who remembers the TV series *Happy Days* and its most popular character The Fonz? Just in case you're too young to remember, this was a US sitcom set in post war Fifties America, and featured the typical day-to-day pranks of a bunch of adolescent kids who looked up to Fonzie, the charismatic uber-cool middle-aged biker who rented the apartment above the family garage, and could make all girls melt on the spot. Just like any normal household.

When I watched it first time round, it was set in the US city of Milwaukee – which I'd never heard of until watching the antics of The Fonz. The show ran from about 1975 to 1985, around about the time I was always to be found in an arcade.

So, fast forward 25 years and I find myself at a loose end one weekend, in Chicago, as you do, and some local arcade buddies arranged for a load of us to head up the coast of lake Michigan to this mythical place 'Milwaukee' to go to a real live auction of arcade games, pinballs, and other slot machine memorabilia the likes of which just don't happen here in Blighty. These auctions happen maybe half a dozen times a year, and on this particular occasion there was supposed to be 400+ machines.

Yup – 400 or more machines lined up ready for sentencing in a huge warehouse. There's usually a good selection of cabs from mid-Seventies to mid-Eighties. Prices for classic cabs may have peaked between 2001 and 2003, and are now somewhat lower, but there's a thriving community of collectors who visit these auctions in the hope of unearthing a bargain. These guys also like to go on 'warehouse raids' when one of them finds out about a retiring arcade operator with a barn full of cabs that will otherwise end up at an auction or just rot away. I try and resist buying anything, but this is harder than it sounds. The biggest problem I've always faced is how on earth to get my acquisitions back home.

So what happens at an American arcade auction? Well, it's damn noisy, with the auctioneer's voice dominating everything, along with hundreds of people milling about, hoping to grab a bargain. Everybody turns up in a really huge four-wheel drive of some sort, the likes of which wouldn't fit on UK roads, they always have a thumping great V8, and often come in a nice shade of black. And everyone's in their forties. These guys flock to the auctions to meet fellow nuts and chew the fat – generally while pawing through boxes of spare circuit boards in the hope of finding that Holy Grail of arcade spares, or just something really useful like a working black-and-white television as used in early games and impossible to find anywhere else.

I have a simple theory why there's so many American arcade collectors in their forties. It's because they're at the age when they have fond memories of their youth (playing games in noisy arcades), but now have a bit of disposable income, a nice home, and… a huge basement. Just about all American homes typically have said huge basement, often 1,000-2,000 sq ft, say, a room maybe 50ft by 30ft under the whole house. These are absolutely ideal for collecting big items like arcade cabs and pinball's. Very few British houses have such a useful space, and if a house over here has a 'cellar' its more likely to be a small room with restricted height that's damp and gloomy with frogs leaping about, or wet walls with impossible access for anything bigger than a cardboard box of some home-made wine you're never going to drink.

As with all things American though, they tend to do it big and some collectors I know

"SOME COLLECTORS HAVE 50 MACHINES ALL OUT ON DISPLAY IN A THEMED ROOM DECKED OUT WITH NEON SIGNS, CARPETS THAT FLUORESCE UNDER BLACK LIGHTS, AND CHROME-COVERED BAR AREAS WITH STOOLS AROUND THEM" ARCHER MACLEAN



» A lot of the games still worked, which was nice.



» Buy one get one free.

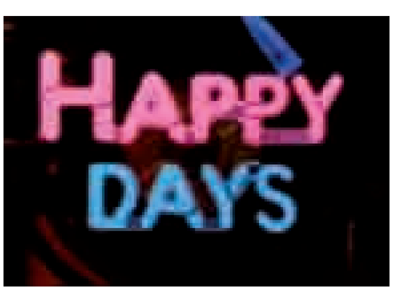
have 50-odd machines all out on display in a themed room decked out with neon signs, carpets that fluoresce under black lights, and chrome-covered bar areas with stools around them, sometimes looking just like a film set of Arnolds Drive-In from *Happy Days*.

The biggest US hoarder I ever met has obsessively piled up an amazing 1,400 cabs packed into six floors of a warehouse that he owns. The story goes that he was left the warehouse in a will 20 years ago, and at the time he was a contract programmer who had to drive all over the place sorting out office installations. On his way back home from various jobs, he would call into arcade operators' warehouses and make them a cash offer for all the obsolete and broken cabs they had taking up storage space. He also started going to auctions. One by one they piled up until it just got completely out of hand. He's now slowly putting them out on eBay or parting them out for spares and has had to be quite ruthless to get on top of his 'habit'.

Most of the real classics have long since been snapped up and squirrelled away, and



» That once famous logo lives on.



» If you recognise this you're getting old.



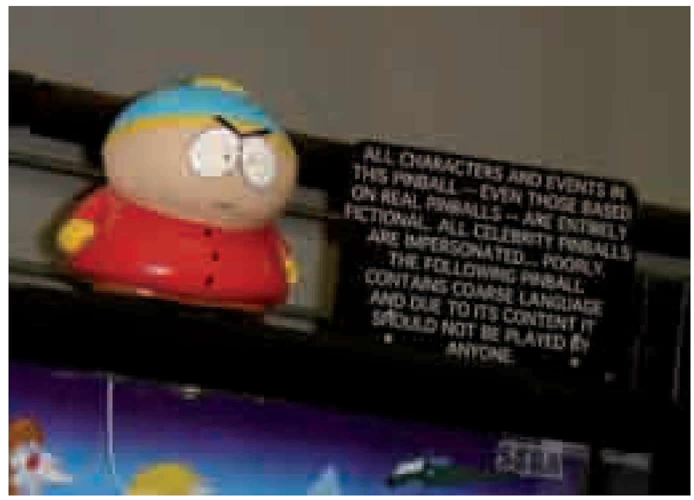
» Giant SUV MPV 4WD things for hauling cabs away.

the auctions these days tend to be 80 per cent average stuff, JAMMA cabs, and endless Golden Tee Derivatives or huge sit-down driving games that have reached the end of their earning life and are now put out to pasture in the auction halls. Surprisingly, big driving games are real cheap because they are a nuisance to move around. Prices for everything seems to fall in the band of $100-$400 (about £50-£200).

On this particular trip I saw a few classic games, like a couple of working *Robotron*s, *Donkey Kong* uprights, and some early black-and-white games that have seen better days. One real rarity hidden in amongst the hundreds of other drivers was a working *Night Driver Sit Down*. I've never seen one in the UK, and only come across three in my life. What's unusual is that they have spangly candy-apple paint work all over their fibreglass bodywork, and the paint is just like the first ever video arcade game, *Computer Space*, and its futuristic curvy shell. The game might be a very simple early driving game with a primitive 3D effect of roadside posts flying toward you on a dark road, but it holds fond memories for many. Another rarity was an *Atari Warlords* four-player cocktail but in such a bad state that it's almost beyond repair.

I went to the auction with no intention of actually buying anything as I didn't want to deal with the hassle of somehow getting it back to the UK. But temptation got the better of me, and I saw this sad-but-working *Pac-Man Cocktail* table just staring up at me begging to be restored and given a new lease of life. I persuaded someone to put it in the back of his station wagon.

I paid about $300 (£150) for it, as-is. Anyway, we got it back to his home, mounted it onto a mini-pallet and built a simple wooden crate around it, like a three-foot cube, all for about $50, and it was picked up by the airfreight company on a Friday afternoon in



» Sign found on top of a *South Park* Pinball Machine. Well it made me laugh.

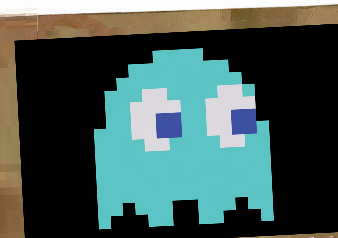
Chicago. Amazingly, this mini-crated *Pac-Man* was delivered to my home in the UK on the following Tuesday, just four days later, and the total cost was under £350. Which is almost quicker than sending a simple letter from London to Lands End. All it took was a few emails and a couple of phone calls to the freight people.

What rounded off the whole Milwaukee auction day well was when we were back in the hotel bar in Chicago that evening, I caught sight of a TV sitcom starring Henry Winkler – the actor who played The Fonz 25 years ago. Kind of ironic, but it made me feel, well, old as he's now into his sixties and yet I have this image of the ever-youthful Arthur Fonzarelli in my head, somehow mixed up with all my arcade memories from 1975 to 1985.

Anyway, I now have a really nice restored *Pac-Man Cocktail* to keep me entertained in my old age. Oh happy days indeed.

ARCH

VILLAIN OF THE MONTH



INKY THE GHOST

VILLAIN OF THE MONTH

Without a bad villain there would be no good heroes. What would the Ninja Turtles be without Shredder? What would Wolverine be without Sabertooth? Rubbish, that's what. This month: Inky the Ghost

First Appearance: *Pac-Man*

Distinguishing Features: Ummm, he's Turquoise

Weapon of Choice: Deadly touch

Most likely to: Team up with three other ghosts and chase Pac-Man

Least likely to: Appear in an episode of *Rentaghost*

Unusual fact: Inky is also known as 'Bashful'

retro GAMER DIARY

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO...

EVENT HOSTING retro GAMER

IF YOU WANT RETRO GAMER TO PROMOTE UPCOMING GAMES AND EVENTS, CONTACT US AT RETROGAMER@IMAGINE-PUBLISHING.CO.UK

Just because Retro Gamer looks to the past that doesn't mean that there aren't games and events to look forward to. Every month we'll be listing suitable games and events for you to add to your 'to do' list



MAY 07

FINAL FANTASY III

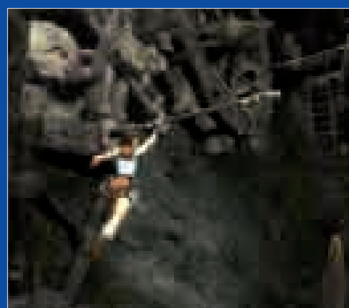
Released: 04 May

Publisher: Nintendo

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

Already a huge seller in both Japan and the US, Nintendo and Square Enix are no doubt hoping to achieve similar success in the UK when Final Fantasy III is released later this year. We've been playing the US version for a while now, and this great 3D update (the SNES version was only ever available in Japan) is everything we were hoping for and more. Expect a full review next issue.



MAY 07

TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY

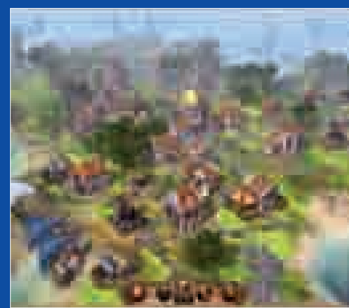
Released: 25 May

Publisher: Eidos

Price: £34.99

Format: PS2, PSP, PC

Obviously wanting to celebrate *Lara Croft*'s tenth birthday in style, Eidos is going back to basics and is releasing a re-jigged version of her original adventure. Sporting tasty new visuals, a variety of enhanced puzzles and boobs that now actually look real, *Anniversary* is bound to relight the nostalgic fires of anyone who owned the original game.



JUNE 07

THE SETTLERS 2: THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY

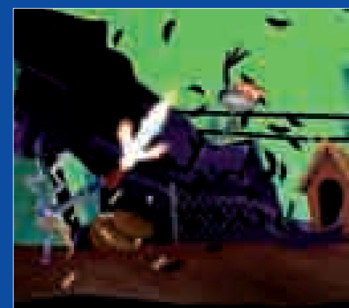
Released: 01 June

Publisher: Ubisoft

Price: £29.99

Format: DS, PC

Finally publishers are cottoning on to the fact that the DS's stylus makes it ideal for playing strategy games. *Settlers 2* was easily one of the highlights of the franchise, and it will be interesting to see how it compares to the likes of *Sim City DS* and *Theme Park DS*. Don't get too excited by the detailed screenshot though. It's from the PC version.



JUNE 07

EARTHWORM JIM

Released: 29 June

Publisher: Atari

Price: £34.99

Format: PSP

Whilst we've not managed to play Earthworm Jim's latest adventure, early screens and videos suggest that it could be a decent return to form. While the visuals have been updated, they do mimic the style of the original and seem to have captured its wacky sense of humour. There's also a two-player mode, although we're unsure at this time if it's co-operative or not.



JUNE 07

SNK VS CAPCOM: CARD FIGHTERS

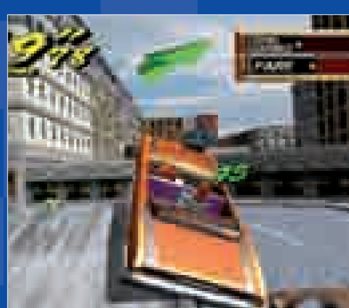
Released: 29 June

Publisher: Ignition

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

As great as the original Neo Geo Pocket version was, we're expecting the DS outing to be even better – mainly due to the fact that it will be fully controlled via the stylus. Early reports are suggesting that this new version is far trickier than the original game, but we're confident that SNK Playmore has been able to retain everything that made the Neo Geo Pocket version so much fun to play.



JULY 07

CRAZY TAXI: FARE WARS

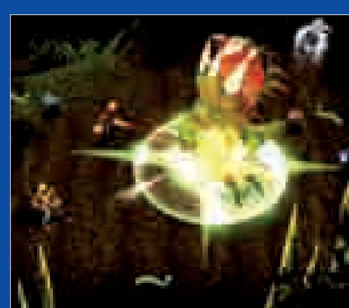
Released: July

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: PSP

Crazy Taxi was one of our favourite Dreamcast games, so it's great to see that it's being shrunken down to fit onto Sony's PSP. Featuring elements from both *Crazy Taxi* and its Dreamcast only sequel, *Crazy Taxi: Fare Wars* will be the first game in the franchise's history to offer a multiplayer mode and is bound to be a huge hit with fans of the original. Will The Offspring decide to return though?



AUGUST 07

ALIEN SYNDROME

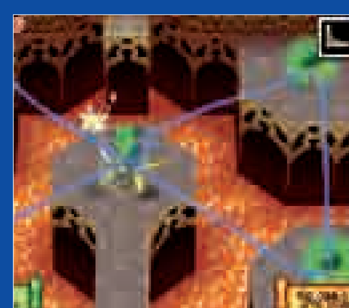
Released: 31 August

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: PSP, Wii

It may be one of Sega's more obscure coin-ops, but we're actually really looking forward to *Alien Syndrome*. While the original was basically a sci-fi take on *Gauntlet*, the PS2 update that was released under the Sega Ages banner was a rip-roaring blaster that we still occasionally return to. Early reports suggest that this new update will feature a similar blend of aliens, gunplay and slime. We can't wait.



DECEMBER 07

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: PHANTOM HOURGLASS

Released: December

Publisher: Nintendo

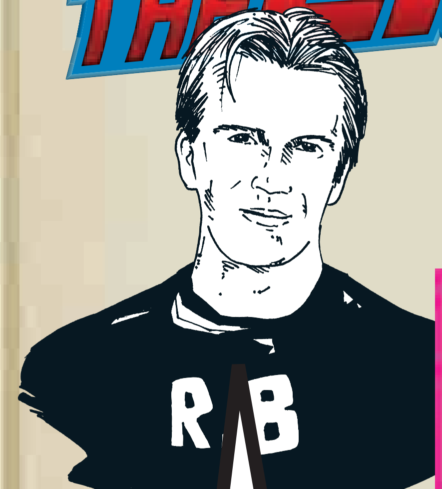
Price: £29.99

Format: DS

One of our most anticipated DS titles has slipped to December '07. While *Phantom Hourglass* features a similar graphical style to *The Wind Waker*, it's set to make full use of the DS's unique abilities, allowing for some competitive play against another DS owner. With everything from Link's movement to combat being controlled by the stylus, this could well be the most distinctive *Zelda* yet.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM MAY 1983



With Ultimate about to fly high with *Jet Pac,* Imagine staff flying higher in Ferrari's, Sinclair starts a computing price war. Horace meets some spiders and new magazines appear for BBC and Dragon users – it's welcome back to May 1983. Richard Burton points the way.



» Ultimate arrives on the home computing scene with two stunning new games. Software houses start bricking it…

The first advertisements for a new software house started to filter into the mainstream computing magazines of the time. The company, Ultimate: Play The Game, began advertising the first of its wares, two Spectrum games called *Jet Pac* and *Pssst*.

Although the games had not been officially previewed, the rumblings were that they were a step up from the usual Spectrum software offerings, having a much more professional feel to them. Ultimate was staying tight-lipped about its new titles, preferring to let the software do the talking, something it would continue throughout the life span of the company.

The first inklings of excess at Liverpool-based software house, Imagine, were being reported in the press. Imagine, which famously imploded on the BBC2 television programme *Commercial Breaks*, was a fairly new company but had enjoyed immediate success with titles such as *Arcadia* on the Vic-20 and Spectrum.

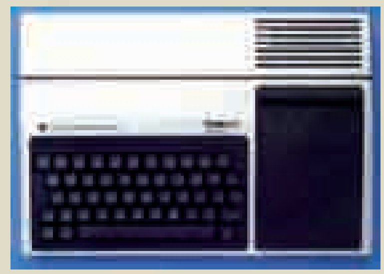
There were reports that several staff members at Imagine had taken delivery of top-of-the-range cars including a Ferrari Mondial, Ferrari 308 GTS and BMW 735i. Bruce Everiss, the general manager, was quoted as saying: "We are a dynamic industry so we all drive dynamic cars." Even 17-year-old programmer Eugene Evans was given an Escort XRI, even though his driving test was a month away. Everiss said: "We would have got him something better but the insurance would cost a lot more." If nothing else, Imagine certainly knew how to spend its profits. Fellow Liverpudlian software creator, Bug-Byte, wrote a letter to *Popular Computing Weekly* pointing out that this was the exception rather than the norm regarding software house motor vehicle preferences. It wrote: "Tony Baden, co-director, is awaiting delivery of a Robin Reliant complete with GT stripe, and our newly appointed creative and artwork head, Les Harvey, is believed to have ordered a Skoda Estelle even though he thinks it's a bit flash." The letter concluded with, "Stop press. Harvey distraught. Estelle not available. Yugo ordered."

In between laying out large wads of cash for spanking brand new cars, Imagine also found time to release its two latest creations, *Molar Maul* for the Spectrum and *Frantic* for the Vic-20.

Sinclair Research, not content with out-selling every newcomer to the computing market, decided to cut prices on its systems, lowering the 16K machine from £125 to £99.95, and dropping the 48K



» *Molar Maul* (Imagine): A new game about brushing teeth? Next week: 'Bottom Wiping Simulator'…



» New TI99/4a purchasers received free bread when buying a new system rather than money off. Ideal for toasting in the cartridge slot.

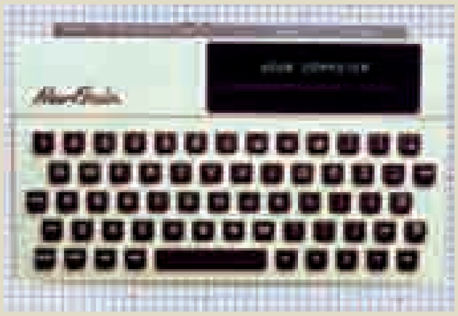
from £175 to £129.95 and even the ZX81 looked competitive with a wallet-friendly price tag of just £39.95.

The general consensus for the drastic pricing realignment was due to the constant wave of new machines seen as possible threats to Sinclair sales. With many of these systems less powerful and, when initially announced, lower priced, they may have been seen as a viable alternative. With Sinclair effectively pricing those machines out of the market and making the Spectrum the only real colour machine under a hundred pounds with any sort of software base to its name, the empire of Clive Sinclair looks to be on a very firm footing.

So who would be first to react to the news? Well, virtually everyone as it turned out. Commodore immediately announced a £50 drop in price for its Vic-20 machine



» Here's just one of the cars purchased by Imagine's staff during their heyday. That's Imagine Software and not Publishing…



» The Newbrain also received a price reduction in the computer price wars. Quite who actually bought one is still a mystery.



» The Interface 2 and ROM cart format was set to revolutionise software loading on the Spectrum… sort of.

and Atari decided to follow suit and trim the price of its Atari 800 computer down to £299 from £399.

Texas Instruments decided it would be better to give away freebies rather than reduce the system price so it included a £100+ package of extras for each new TI99/4A purchased during the summer. It would include a pair of joysticks, TI cassette recorder and a ROM cartridge, among the giveaways. Even Grundy Business Systems lopped off £25 from the price of its Newbrain computer, not that anyone had bought one in the first place.

Furthermore, Acorn and its as-yet-unreleased Electron computer, was reportedly considering altering its launch price to fall into line with the competition. With the Electron's impending release with the particularly unattractive price point of £150, the undergarments of Acorn head honcho Chris Curry must have been a fairly breezy place.

However, he did muster a counter-attack claiming that the Spectrum couldn't compete with the Electron's "superior performance in the same price bracket." Was Curry stirring the melting pot of computer price-wars by claiming Sinclair was running scared at the arrival of the Electron? This one could end up in a fight… in a pub… or something… one day.

Another company that was gearing up for a new system release was Memotech. Known mainly for producing RAM packs for the ZX81, it decided to turn its hands to bringing out a brand new micro. The MTX500 would feature a top-notch keyboard, a Z80A CPU and 32K RAM, with an expected launch price of around £250 when it is unveiled at the London Computer Fair in June.

While not as attractive looking as Memotech's next offering, the gloriously black and imposing MTX512, it was still a good machine. As with any new entrant into the market, there was one question mark hanging over the machine: would anyone be producing software for it?

The impending release of the Sord M5, initially expected to have been ready and available for consumers in November, was almost here. In a cunning reversal of the current price trend set by almost every other computer manufacturer, Japanese company Sord decided to increase the

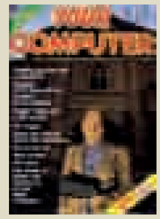


» Horace in his third and most testing adventure. A fourth was planned – *Horace To The Rescue* – but wasn't released.



» The MTX500 wasn't as pretty to look at as its bigger sister the Memotech MTX512. Games, you say? Er…

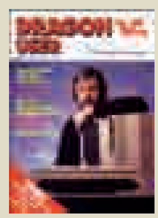
WHAT THE MAGAZINES WERE SAYING…



Your Computer

Calling itself "Britain's biggest-selling home computer magazine", *YC* was certainly a good all-round publication with a balanced mix of gaming and hardware. The cover feature this month detailed the story of a man and his Spectrum-powered ghost-hunting equipment helping in his quest for paranormal activity. PK energy was rising or was that the ZX power supply?

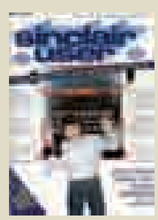




Dragon User

With the first issue of *Dragon User* came a feature highlighting the good and bad points of the Dragon 32 and its nearest rivals. Unsurprisingly, the usual 8-bit suspects faired moderately with individual machines pulled up on their unique quirks while the Dragon machine was rated as having "great potential." Yeah… as a doorstop.





Sinclair User

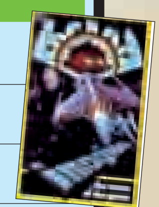
SU's User Of The Month was Alan Howell, a guy who used his CB radio to transmit Spectrum programs. When asked about why he bought a Spectrum he replied: "I wanted to buy a really good calculator and that's what I thought I was buying. I admit when I first took it home and realised it was a computer, I was really annoyed."



CHARTS

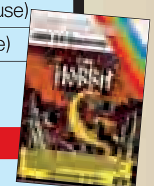
MAY 1983

VIC-20



1 Arcadia (Imagine)
2 Panic (Bug-Byte)
3 Amok (Audiogenic)
4 Wacky Waiters (Imagine)
5 Cosmiads (Bug-Byte)

SPECTRUM



1 The Hobbit (Melbourne House)
2 Time Gate (Quicksilva)
3 Penetrator (Melbourne House)
4 Arcadia (Imagine)
5 Vu-3D (Psion/Sinclair)

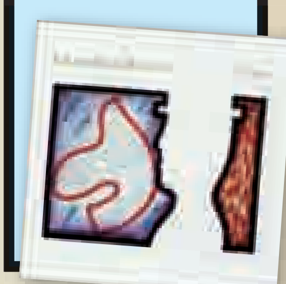
DRAGON 32



1 Donkey King (Microdeal)
2 Katerpillar Attack (Microdeal)
3 Space War (Microdeal)
4 Dragon Trek (Salamander Software)
5 Alcatraz (Microdeal)

MUSIC SINGLES CHART MAY '83

1 True (Spandau Ballet)
2 Temptation (Heaven 17)
3 Dancing Light (Galaxy ft. Phil Fearon)
4 Keep Feeling Fascination (Human League)
5 Candy Girl (New Edition)







» Surrey came good in the second innings… by cracking the ball under the sofa and running 67 off one delivery…

NEWS

MAY 1983

30 May 1983 saw Surrey take on Essex in a County Championship match. Nothing particularly unusual with that except that Surrey managed to get bowled out for a record-busting innings of just 14 runs.

The Surrey captain, when questioned about him team's first innings performance, said: "We hadn't batted awfully well." A quite superb English understatement. With the second innings looming, Essex enforced the follow-on and Surrey, with either voodoo magic or a cricket bat the size of a Mini Metro, managed to register 185-3 to claim an unlikely draw.

More sports news came with Liverpool announcing that legendary manager Bob Paisley was to retire from running the team, and his assistant, Joe Fagan, would be his replacement. Fittingly, Paisley ended his final season in charge by winning the First Division Championship, Charity Shield and League Cup. His final game in charge was a league match against Watford on 14 May 1983.

Return Of The Jedi, episode six of the *Star Wars* movie series, made its worldwide debut in the US of A on 25 May. Featuring Jabba's Palace and its wandering B'omarr Monks, Sarlacc Pit shenanigans, Darth Vader and the Emperor's demise and the cutesy furball Ewok's, *Return Of The Jedi* was a solid end film for the first of three planned trilogies.



» Mr Fiddly Pants Lucas releases a Super Special Special Extra Special Edition of *ROTJ*. Sebastian Shaw is erased… heresy we tell you.



» *River Raid* (Activision): One of the great games on the Atari 2600. Score big and get yourself a high-score patch.



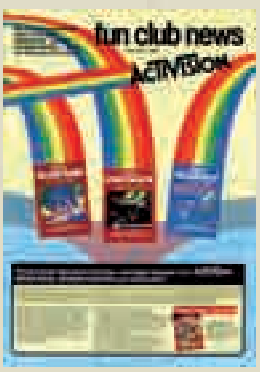
» *Space Zombies* (Mikro-Gen): In a similar vein to Imagine's *Arcadia*, the smoothness and gameplay just weren't comparable.

price of its computer by £20 to £190. Something must have got lost in the translation process somewhere.

Meanwhile, when he wasn't preparing for a spot of pinstriped fisticuffs, Clive Sinclair, with the aid of Psion, was developing ROM-based cartridge software for the Spectrum. With a proposed release date set at 'late summer', the pairing was deep in the development stage of producing the interface to run the software, later to be called Interface 2.

With six titles already set for release and a projected price tag per title of around £10, was this going to be the new software format of the future for Sinclair? With just ten titles eventually released, a resounding "no" can still be heard echoing through the darkened halls of Sinclair Research to this day. Bit of a shame really.

Psion and Melbourne House also announced that their third game in the *Horace* trilogy was ready to be released. *Horace & The Spider* would be available to buy at the end of the month and was also going to be released, together with Horace's two other videogaming appearances, onto the ROM cartridge software format.



» Activision's free newsletter was not only a good read, you could also win sew-on patches for high scores.

The latest edition of Activision's Fun Club newsletter, the quarterly read for gamers and fans of Atari 2600 software and Activision in equal measure, were plopping though letterboxes across the country. They detailed a few of the new releases that were in readiness for their big summer sales offensive. Three titles Activision was particularly pushing were *Sea Quest*, *Spider Fighter* and, the most excellent, *River Raid*. You want simple and addictive retro-gaming? Give *River Raid* a bash.

The Dragon 32 and its followers finally got a magazine to call their own this month when *Dragon User* hit the newsstands during May. It was mainly a mix of tech-related features and type-ins with just the merest hint of games wafting through its pages.

A&B Computing, the first issue of a bi-monthly magazine aimed squarely at the BBC owners who hadn't taken a shine to the *BBC Micro User* magazine, itself only on its third issue, was available to buy during May and June.

With software gradually becoming better and more plentiful with each passing month, the reviews pages of the computer magazines were becoming more prominent. The software was still largely clones of *Space Invaders*, *Centipede* and *Pac-Man* games though, because software houses tried to cash in on the insatiable appetite of gamers who wanted these early arcade conversions.

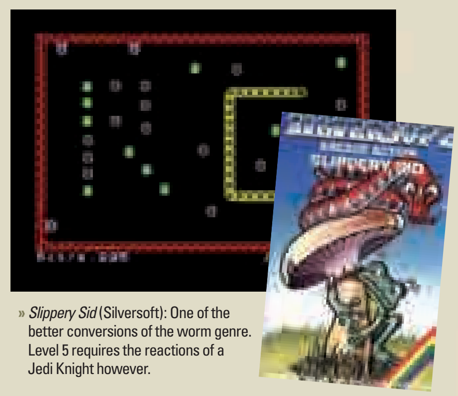
Issue 14 of *Sinclair User* glanced its critical eye over *Space Zombies* (Mikro-Gen), *3D Tanx* and *Centipede* (both DK'Tronics) and *Sub Track* (Amba Software). *Computer & Video Games* ran the rule over *Defender* (Atari, Atari 400/800), *Super Glooper* (Psion, ZX81), *Schizoids* (Imagine, Spectrum) and *Cyber Rats* (Spectrum, Silversoft).

Home Computing Weekly featured a swathe of reviews throughout its May issues with *Slippery Sid* (Silversoft, Spectrum), *Invaders* (IJK Software, BBC), *Space Attack* (Romik, Vic-20), *Skyhawk* (Quicksilva, Vic-20), *Krazy Kong* (Anirog, Vic-20), *Mad Martha* (Mikro-Gen, Spectrum) and *Ocean Trader* (Quicksilva, ZX81) among the software rated.

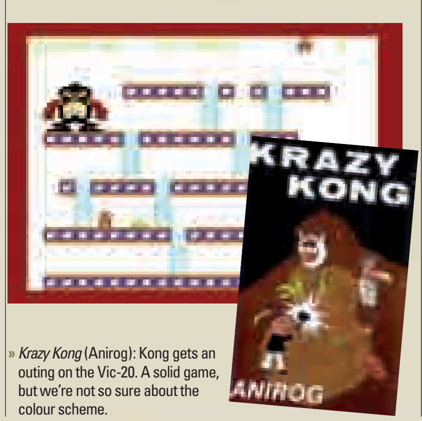
The slightly more serious weekly magazine, *Personal Computer News*, rated *Headbangers Heaven* (Llamasoft, Spectrum), *Motor Mania* (Audiogenic, C64), *Dictator* (DK'Tronics, Spectrum), *Starship Command* (Acornsoft, BBC), *Nowotnik Puzzle* (Phipps Associates, Spectrum) and *Harvester* (Pixel Productions, Vic-20) during its May issues.



» As the computing market grows, new publications are born on a regular basis. This months' new boy is *A&B Computing*.



» *Slippery Sid* (Silversoft): One of the better conversions of the worm genre. Level 5 requires the reactions of a Jedi Knight however.



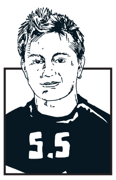
» *Krazy Kong* (Anirog): Kong gets an outing on the Vic-20. A solid game, but we're not so sure about the colour scheme.

ROLLER COASTER

IT HAS ITS UPS AND DOWNS…



- **PUBLISHER:** ELITE
- **RELEASED:** 1985
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ZX SPECTRUM
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** FREE



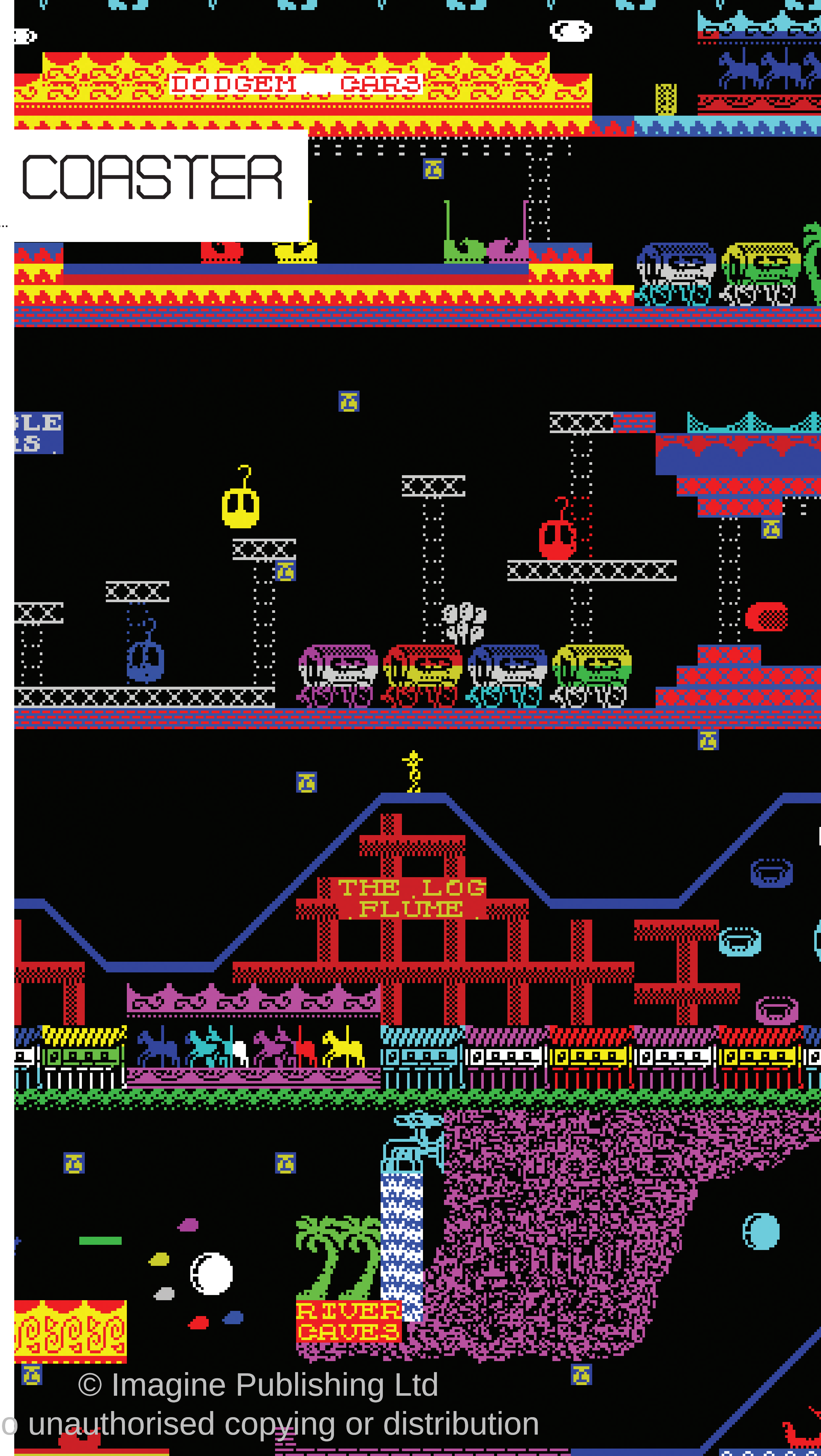
HISTORY

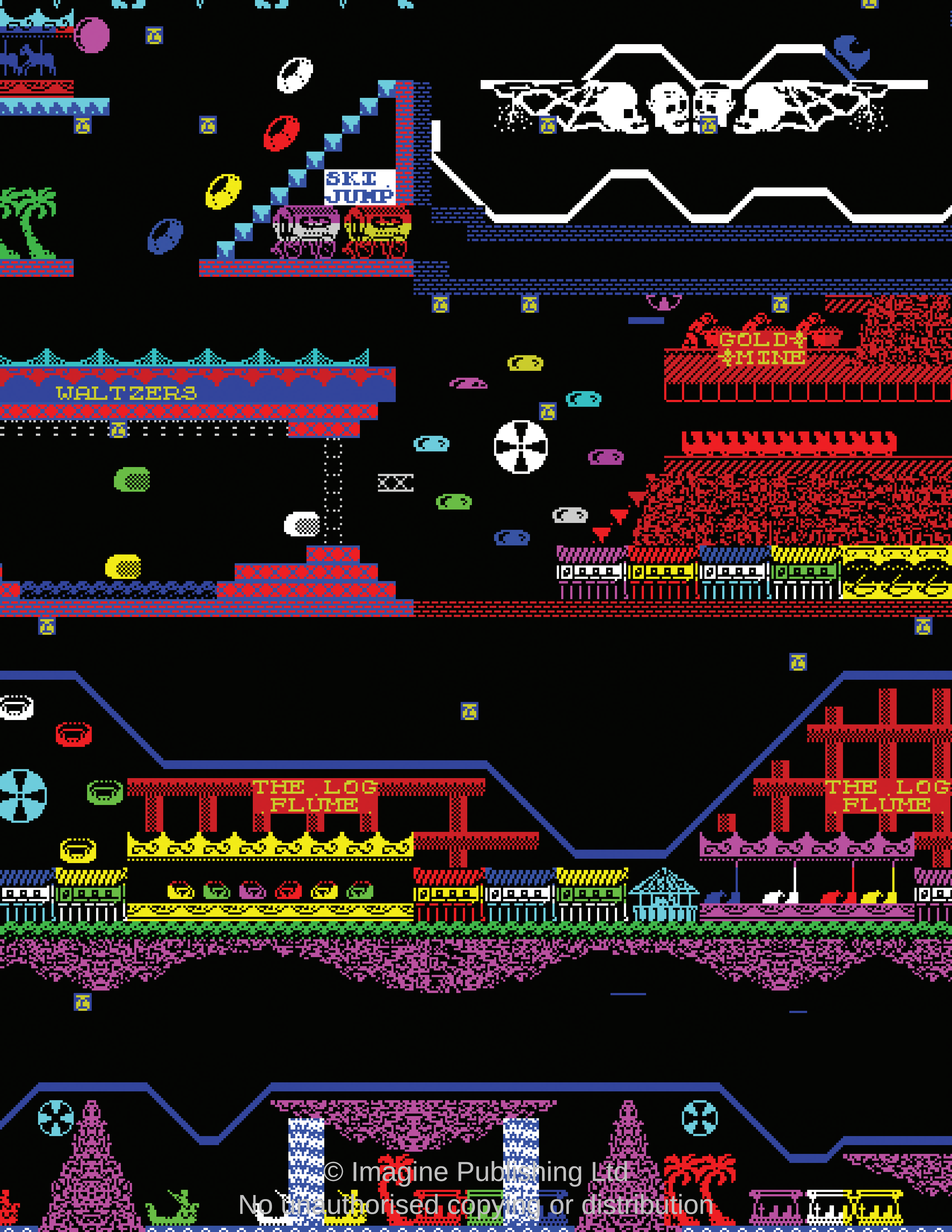
Crash Smashed it, and YS Mega Gamed it, but I have to stand firm and say this game is only "quite" good. But then again, *Manic Miner* isn't even in my top 20 all-time favourites (ouch! That was weird. I was just struck by lightening). Still, a few extra bonus points should be thrown Elite's way for taking a chance with *Roller Coaster* and trying a style of gameplay it didn't normally court – a gamble that apparently paid off, as the punters lapped it up.

Taking on the role of a penny-pinching theme park visitor, it's your job to traverse the massive, 60 screens-wide, brightly-coloured fairground, and surreptitiously trouser all the loose change which has escaped from the pockets of the other coaster riders. It matters not a jot, but this flimsy premise does leave a few gaping plot holes which I, a discerning Spec-chum, feel the need to highlight. One, why the hell is your character wearing a Mounty hat; Two, where are the long, snaking lines synonymous with such rides; and three, wouldn't the protagonist be better cast as a grubby carney rather than an impoverished patron on the loose (carnies scare me – smell like cabbage – small hands)?

But, dismounting from the high horse for a few minutes, it doesn't take long to find the distinctly addictive qualities the magazines of yore did rave about. Most every aspect of every theme park in the world is included, and nowhere is off limits to the cash-hungry daring doer: from braving the toe-curling vertigo of the roller coaster's highest peak, to performing a dance of death with an out-of-control Waltzer, and plundering the treacherous waters of the log flume, *Roller Coaster* lives up to its name and takes the player on a nonstop adventure ride.

It may not be a feat of majestic engineering sponsored by a soft drink giant, but it dances to the tune of the Spectrum quite elegantly.



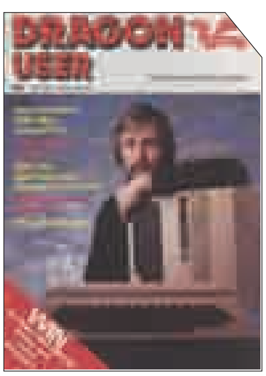

SKI JUMP
WALTZERS
GOLD MINE
THE LOG FLUME
THE LOG FLUME

DRAGON 32

THIS IS WHY RETRO GAMER IS GREAT. LAST MONTH WE LOOKED AT THE WONDERSWAN, THE POCKET-SIZED CONSOLE CONCEIVED IN THE BREATH-TAKING CITY OF KYOTO, WHILE THIS ISSUE OUR FOCUS IS THE DRAGON 32, THE CHUNKY 8-BIT MICRO MANUFACTURED IN THE FORMER STEEL TOWN OF PORT TALBOT. MARTYN CARROLL CHARTS THE HISTORY OF THE DRAGON AND DISCOVERS WHY IT'S MUCH MORE THAN JUST "THAT WELSH COMPUTER"...

DRAGON DISCOURSE

A sure fire way of pulling computer users together and creating a community is with a dedicated magazine, and for Dragon users there was, well, Dragon User. Published by Sunshine Publications and launched in April 1983, the monthly magazine featured a healthy mix of news, product reviews, regular columns, features, technical help and – that publishing phenomenon – type-in listings! The magazine also interviewed key people, including Dragon managing directors Tony Clarke and Brian Moore, but being an independent title it never felt the need to pay lip service to the company. With no direct competition, Dragon User was a popular magazine with average monthly sales of 36,000 during its first two years. The readership unsurprisingly slipped, however, and in June 1986 Sunshine announced that the magazine would only be available on a subscription basis. It was finally dropped in May 1988, only for Dragon software publisher Bob Harris to pick up the reins and personally oversee seven more issues. It was finally laid to rest in January 1989, having served the Dragon community for the best part of six years.



The Dragon 32 made its UK debut in August 1982. It was a product of Dragon Data, the Swansea-based subsidiary of toy manufacturer Mettoy. The rise and fall of Dragon Data is fascinating: a story of success and struggle, buy-ins and buy-outs. Our focus is the machine itself, so we're not going to get bogged down in all the business stuff – if you're interested you'll find an excellent warts and all account by David Linsley over at www.dragon-archive.co.uk.

In short, Mettoy was struggling financially and formed Dragon Data to diversify its business. It realised that the UK home computer market was about to explode and was shrewd enough to see that Sinclair, Acorn, Oric and the other manufacturers were struggling to meet the huge demand. Christmas 1982 would be a critical period and if Mettoy wanted to wrestle the market share from Sinclair it needed to act fast and have a challenger waiting ringside. That's when it came up with a cunning plan.

ANOTHER CUP OF COCO

It's reasonably well known that the Dragon 32 is a clone of the Tandy Color Computer (or CoCo as it's commonly known), a machine that achieved success in the US. They share most of the same innards, being based around the Motorola 6809 family of chips (processor, video circuitry and memory management). Even the keyboard layout and various ports are essentially the same. They're so similar that you'd assume Dragon Data simply licensed the CoCo design for use in the UK – but you'd be wrong. What actually happened was that Dragon 'borrowed' the Motorola chipset configuration on which the CoCo was based and then made a few tweaks to differentiate the Dragon 32.

The changes made not only prevented the Dragon 32 from being a complete clone of the CoCo, but rather audaciously they served to improve on Tandy's two-year-old machine. Early CoCos shipped with as little as 4Kb of RAM, whereas the Dragon 32 came with 32Kb of RAM as standard (hence the name). This allowed Dragon to licence Microsoft Extended Color Basic – the out-of-the-box CoCo made do with Microsoft's standard Color Basic interpreter. The serial port of the CoCo was replaced with a parallel interface for speedy, standardised printing. And externally, the Dragon 32 featured a deluxe fully moving keyboard while CoCo users had to cope with a cheap calculator-style keyboard.



THE CHANGES MADE NOT ONLY PREVENTED THE DRAGON 32 FROM BEING A COMPLETE CLONE OF THE COCO, BUT THEY SERVED TO IMPROVE ON TANDY'S TWO-YEAR-OLD MACHINE.



Year released: 1982

Original price: £175

Buy it now for: £5-10 loose, £20-30 complete

Associated magazines: Dragon User, The Rainbow (CoCo)

Why the Dragon 32 was great… The Dragon was an excellent general-purpose machine that catered for different types of user. Beginners were offered an excellent introduction to programming thanks to the inclusion of Microsoft Basic, serious users could purchase a wide range of utility and productivity software, while Johnny Gamer had access to hundreds of arcade and adventure titles. The Dragon could pretty much do it all.



DRAGON 32



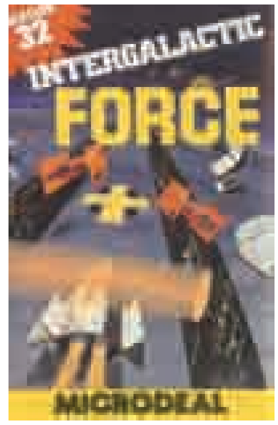
» The Dragon was a blatant clone of the Tandy Color Computer. Notice how even the keyboard layout is identical.



» Dragon MDs Tony Clarke and Brian Moore were happy to be quizzed in the independent Dragon User magazine.



» It seemed that no computer was safe from the steaming pile of filth that was *Cascade 50*. Hmmm, maybe they'd sell more copies if they gave a way a free gift, like a fantastic calculator watch!





» The industry may have been more innocent back then, but when it came to copying the latest coin-op hits, most publishers were guilty as hell.

So the Dragon soundly out crafted its US cousin, but how did it compare with the other 8-bits that were clamouring for UK market share? We can ignore the Commodore 64 for now, because while it was released at the same time as the Dragon, its initial retail price was £299. The Dragon's battleground was the cutthroat sub-£200 sector, which, in late 1982, was firmly under Sinclair's control. The Spectrum 48K and the Dragon initially retailed for the same price (around the £175 mark), but stick them side by side and it's hard not to smile – the Speccy really does look like a child's plaything next to the Dragon, with its robust cream case and professional typewriter style keyboard. Drop a Dragon on your foot and it would hurt, whereas a Spectrum would probably bounce right off. Not only did the Dragon look like a proper computer, but it had all the ports and connectors you'd expect. In addition to the parallel printer interface there was a colour monitor socket, twin joystick ports and a slot for plugging in cartridge software. Like the Spectrum, the vast majority of software was available on cassette and loaded via a third-party tape player, although an official Dragon 5.25in disk drive was launched in 1983.

While the Dragon could not match the Spectrum's generous 48Kb memory, it boasted one of the best versions of Basic available. Microsoft Basic was quick, command rich, user friendly and perfect for beginners. It was clearly superior to the Spectrum's non-standard, nonsensical one-touch Basic system, and was perhaps only bettered by BBC Basic. Programming tasks were also aided by the Dragon's CPU, the impressive Motorola 6809E. The 8-bit processor exhibited some 16-bit traits and could reasonably out-power the popular Zilog Z80 and MOS 6502 CPUs that were inside almost every other machine available at the time. However, it was the 6809's individuality – promoted as a unique selling point – that would ultimately clip the Dragon's wings.



IT WAS THE PROCESSOR'S INDIVIDUALITY – PROMOTED AS A UNIQUE SELLING POINT – THAT WOULD ULTIMATELY CLIP THE DRAGON'S WINGS





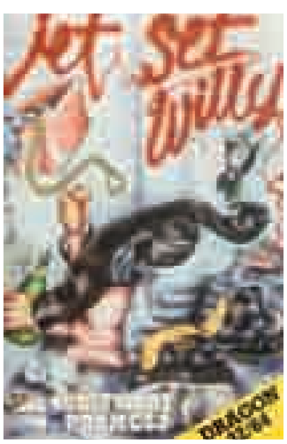
» The brochure promoted the Dragon as "The Family Computer" and made some bold claims – a few of which were actually true.

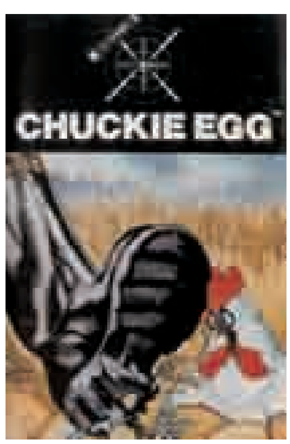
PLAY THE GAME

Now despite what the stuffier computer magazines of the day claimed, most of us weren't buying computers to spin data on a spreadsheet or drive a home business database. The entertainment market was massive and more often than not it



» Written by Richard Wadman, Dragon's marketing director, the programming manual was easy to follow and genuinely useful.





» Two of the most popular 8-bit platformers appeared on the Dragon, and easily held their own against other versions.



» Microdeal must have spent Cuthbert's inheritance on advertising – full-page colour ads for its games appeared in most issues of Dragon User.

SIMON HARDY Q&A

In putting together this article, Simon Hardy of www.dragon-archive.co.uk offered invaluable help and assistance. As a way of saying thanks, we invited Simon to tell us a bit about himself and publicise his excellent resource:

Retro Gamer: When was the very first time you used a Dragon computer?
Simon Hardy: When I was 10 I received a Dragon 32 for my birthday and I fondly remember sitting with my parents playing *Quest* or *Horse Race*. It didn't take me long to start learning to program thanks to the excellent manual that came with the Dragon 32.

RG: What do you think are the Dragon's main assets?
SH: Personally, I loved that fact that it had a proper keyboard, it could be modified and expanded easily (disk drives, modems, HAM radio, digital I/O boards, memory upgrades etc) and was more than just a machine to play games on. Serious software such as Forth, word processors and even a simple DTP package quickly appeared. With the introduction of the Dragon 64 and OS9 even more professional software became available. The National Dragon Users Group was a great source of humour, support and information about what else you could do with your Dragon when you got bored of just playing the games.

RG: Could you briefly outline the history of the Dragon Archive for us?
SH: The archive was founded by myself some years ago to try to collate and preserve information and software relating to the Dragon range of computers. A number of people provided valuable input and material – notable contributors include Ross Hamilton for the content of his defunct Dragon Software Archive and Richard Harding for details of all the prototype machines. Since then a community has grown up around it, with many members contributing to the growing collection of software, books and information. We now have around 40 per cent of all advertised Dragon software archived along with tools to allow collectors to restore damaged tapes and disks. The community is made up of a small number of people who have usually grown up with the Dragon as their first machine and wish to continue the memory. This includes collectors and archivists, emulator authors, and programmers of some of the original games from the Eighties.

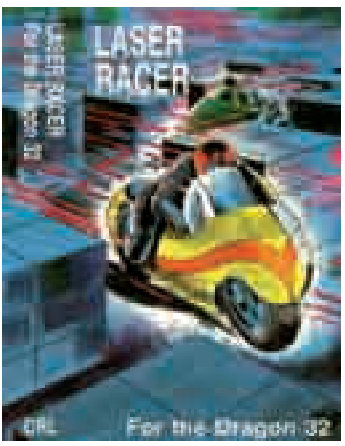
RG: What plans do you have for the site in the future?
SH: More of the same! My time is limited so I have to be careful about priorities when it comes to additions to the site. I am currently in the process of uploading every issue of Dragon User magazine and would like to see the information section grow in content.

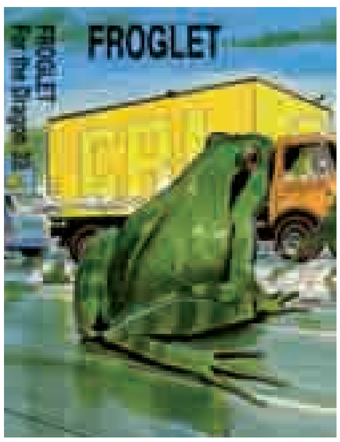
RG: Can Dragon users, and Retro Gamer readers in general, help in any way?
SH: Sure, I know there are lots of retro collectors out there and some of them may have Dragon software tucked away. I'm always on the lookout for any tapes or disks that the archive doesn't currently have, and I can provide assistance and instructions for the entire process of preserving software.

RG: Would you like to see more homebrew software developed for the Dragon?
SH: Yes, the Dragon is an excellent machine to code for. Whether or not it's possible to launch commercial homebrew as currently occurs on other platforms remains to be seen, but I'd love for people to release homebrew into the community. I can even set up a section on the website if people are interested.









» Most publishers have some skeletons in the closet. For CRL it was probably these low-rent arcade rip-offs.

was the quality and quantity of available games that prompted buying decisions. In particular, the acid test was how accurately a home computer could mimic the latest arcade titles.

The Dragon 32 was a capable games machine, but no amount of customisation could hide the fact that the core CoCo technology was already two-years-old. The sound capabilities were fine – a single square-wave oscillator could be controlled using simple commands – but the graphics were lacking. The Dragon had seven levels of resolution – two low-res text modes and five hi-res graphics modes. Nine colours in total were available, but there was a trade-off between colour and resolution. For example, at the highest possible resolution (256x192) it could only display two colours (black and white or black and green). A further frustration was that the text and graphics modes could not be mixed, so in games it wasn't possible to easily print legends on screen like "score" or "status".

To compound matters, UK software houses did not throw support behind the Dragon because its programmers had little or no prior knowledge of the 6809. By 1983 it was clear that for a game to be a commercial success it had to be released on as many platforms as possible and this was usually done by porting the code between machines with the same processors. The Dragon, however, was effectively outcast because of its unique CPU. To write for the Dragon meant starting from scratch and many developers couldn't justify the time and cost.

There were a few exceptions. Well known UK software houses such as Ocean, Imagine, Beyond and Software Projects all dabbled with the Dragon, while CRL and Incentive released a number of quality titles for the computer. In addition there was a small amount of homegrown software, but it was nowhere near enough to satisfy starved Dragon owners. To fill the gap, Dragon Data once again looked to the American market for the answer. Over there, a good amount of decent CoCo software had built up and Dragon Data set about licensing it for sale in the UK. Due to the fact that the Basic ROM was arranged slightly differently on the Dragon, most CoCo cassette software would not load, but they could be fixed using a fairly simple conversion process. Cornish software house Microdeal also began to convert CoCo software for sale on these shores and quickly grew to become the Dragon's most prolific publisher, releasing over 200 games between 1982 and 1988. It's best remembered for its fast-paced arcade games, particularly those starring bespectacled company mascot Cuthbert.

DRAGON'S BANE

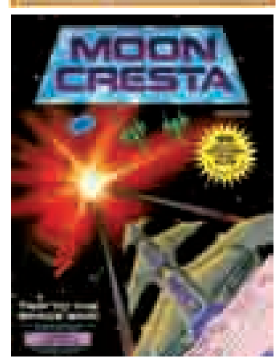
Initial sales of the Dragon 32 were impressive. In the first six months around 40,000 machines were sold, many of these in the Boots chains of chemist. The decision to partner with a high-street store was clever, because it meant that potential buyers could see the computer, test drive it and then take one home if they desired. Compare this to Sinclair's notorious mail-order department, which left customers waiting months for their machines.

Strong sales saw other high-street names clear space for Dragon stock. Manufacturing was moved to a large factory in Port Talbot and production was ramped up to meet demand. However, Dragon failed to consider that sales would naturally fall off during the spring and summer, and the stock began to pile up. It can't have helped either that the competition had become fiercer than ever. The plucky Oric-1 launched in January 1983, and in the summer Sinclair famously slashed the price of its Spectrum, with the 16K model nestling just under the £100 mark.

After a number of delays, November witnessed the UK launch of the Dragon 64. As the name suggests, this was basically a standard machine with double the amount of memory. But at £225, the upgraded model wasn't attractive enough to tempt the Dragon 32 faithful into upgrading (despite a generous trade-in offer and the impending release of the OS9 operating system). Dragon Data's response was to announce two new models – the Dragon 128 (aka 'Beta') and the Dragon Professional (aka 'Alpha') – but in July 1984, before either machine could materialise, the cash-strapped firm was forced to call in the receivers. As a postscript, a Spanish company called Eurohard acquired the Dragon assets and trundled along for a couple of years, releasing the Dragon 200 (essentially a Dragon 64 with a Spanish keyboard), before it too fizzled out.

The Dragon was dead – or maybe not quite. As news of Dragon Data's demise spread, stores quickly began to offload their Dragon stock at bargain prices. Generous bundles were available for as little as £80, and Dixons slashed the price of the Dragon disk drive to £100 (it launched at £275 less than a year earlier). Punters who either didn't know or didn't care about the parent company's collapse snapped up the stock, swelling the user base. And what did it really matter that Dragon Data was no more? It had done its job – the hardware was in the hands of users and software support would continue for years to come.





» Popular software house Incentive supported the Dragon for several years, releasing both arcade games and more involved adventure titles.

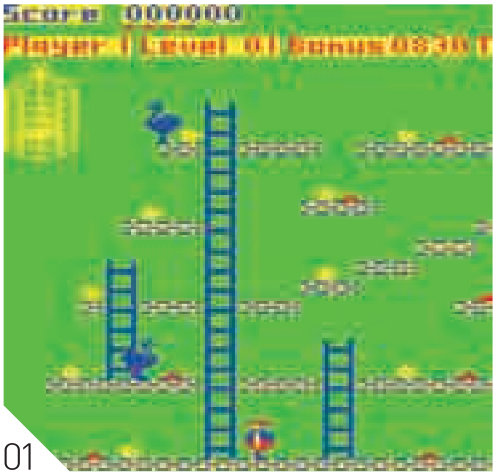
REBORN IN THE USA

In 1983 Dragon Data decided to try to break into the US market. This was an unexpected twist, seeing as it would put the Dragon into direct competition with its non-identical twin, the Tandy Color Computer. Following negotiations with several companies, Dragon set up a partnership with the US-based Tano Corporation who would manufacturer and distribute the machine in America. It was decided that the Dragon 64 would fare better in the US, so in August the machine was launched Stateside as 'Dragon by Tano'. Dragon was so keen to assail the American market that the machine was released there two months before the UK Dragon 64 launch. According to Dragon MD Brian Moore, the machine was "very well received in the US", although Tano stopped supporting the Dragon in late 1984, suggesting quite the opposite. The entire stock was later purchased by California Digital (www.cadigital.com) who can still sell you a brand new shrink-wrapped Tano Dragon for $35 plus tax and shipping!

DRAGON 32

PERFECT TEN GAMES

There were hundreds of games that were released for the Dragon 32, including a few familiar titles and lots of system exclusives. Here are ten of our personal favourites, in no particular order. Before you write in though, any top ten is going to be entirely subjective and of course open to vilent debate, so why not head on over to the forums and discuss it there?



01

CHUCKIE EGG

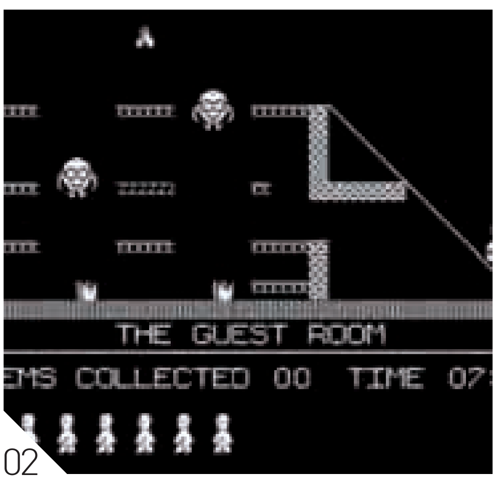
» **RELEASED:** 1983
» **PUBLISHED BY:** A&F SOFTWARE
» **CREATED BY:** MIKE WEBB
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SCREAMING ABDABS

01 **The Dragon version of this classic platformer was not an afterthought; it was developed in tandem with the more famous Spectrum and BBC Micro editions.** And despite what Beeb fans might say, *Chuckie Egg* on the Dragon just about nicks it as the best incarnation of the game. It's vibrant (as you'd expect, seeing as it uses that classic Dragon colour set of green, yellow, blue and red), fast paced, bucket loads of fun to play and it also represents a serious long-term challenge, although we still have no idea whether or not it features the full selection of levels – mainly because our skills in the chicken shed are sadly lacking these days.

JET SET WILLY

» **RELEASED:** 1985
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SOFTWARE PROJECTS
» **CREATED BY:** ROY COATES
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** MANIC MINER

02 **This is something of a curiosity in the *Jet Set Willy* canon, and not just because it's the only monochrome version (the only way of successfully recreating the game was in high resolution mode).** As a way of compensating Dragon owners for the absence of colour, programmer Roy Coates added 13 extra rooms to Miner Willy's already ridiculously oversized mansion. Part of the fun is in finding the additional rooms – you'll probably want to revisit the beach and explore the forgotten abbey. Coates obviously had a fine sense of humour as one of his additional rooms is entitled 'Matthew's Next Game' – and it's completely empty.



02

DONKEY KING

» **RELEASED:** 1983
» **PUBLISHED BY:** MICRODEAL
» **CREATED BY:** TOM MIX SOFTWARE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** KATERPILLAR ATTACK

03 **The Dragon was home to hundreds of coin-op clones, which was only to be expected in those heady days of the early-Eighties.** Of them all, *Donkey King* is the most blatant – not to mention the best. It's almost a carbon copy of Nintendo's original, only with everything viewed in lurid Dragon-o-vision. All four levels are featured, Mario and Kong are there, and the manic gameplay is exactly the same. In fact, we'd go as far as saying that it's better than many of the official home conversions. Realising that it was sailing a little too close to the wind, Microdeal later changed the title to 'The King.'

DEVIL ASSAULT

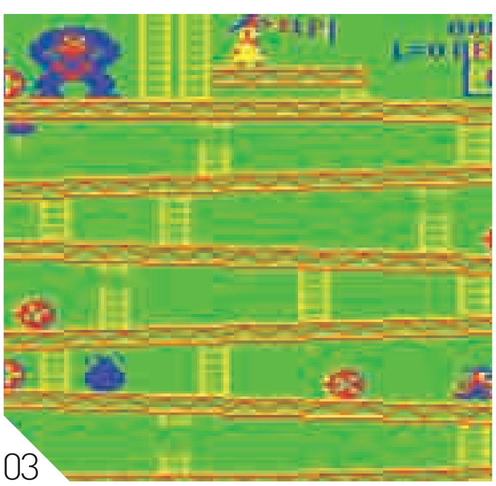
» **RELEASED:** 1983
» **PUBLISHED BY:** MICRODEAL
» **CREATED BY:** TOM MIX SOFTWARE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** CUTHBERT IN THE JUNGLE

04 ***Devil Assault* is a clone of Imagic's *Demon Attack* – see what they did with the name?** If you're unfamiliar with the original, it's basically a trippy version of *Space Invaders*, with the player having to shoot down a number of fast-moving enemies. *Devil Assault* retains the original's speed and silenced any accusations that the Dragon could only cope with slow-paced platformers and maze games. A unique feature is that, once fired, your ship shot follows the path of your ship so you're able to effectively home in on enemies. It's as hectic as hell and one of the best arcade shooters on the machine.

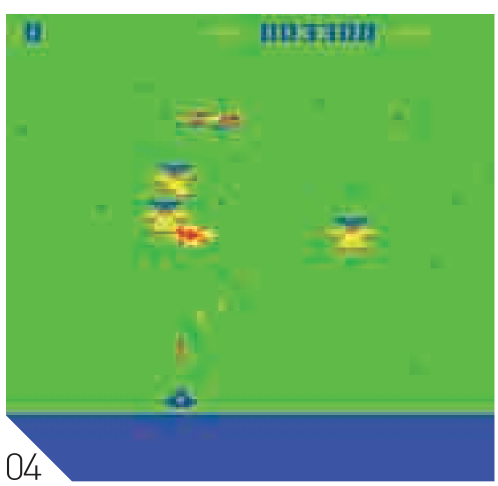
ROMMEL'S REVENGE

» **RELEASED:** 1984
» **PUBLISHED BY:** DESIGN-DESIGN
» **CREATED BY:** RAINBOW SOFTWARE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DARK STAR

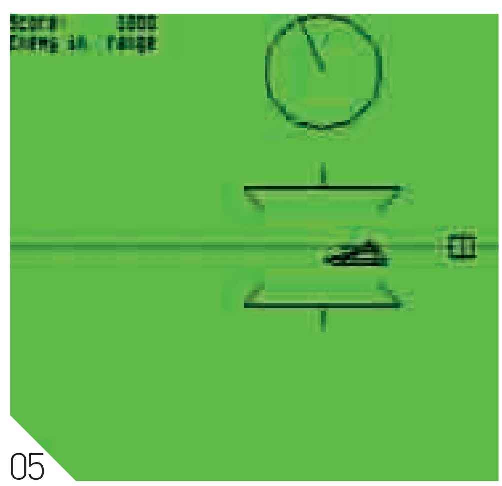
05 **This deserves special mention because of how it imitates a vector graphic display.** Naturally, it makes use of the Dragon's highest resolution mode, but the black-on-green display works much better than the plain black and white. Unlike many vector conversions from back in the day, *Rommel's Revenge* is genuinely a joy to play thanks to the speed and smoothness of the graphics. The gameplay is also great, nicely recreating the atmosphere and tension of the arcade original. Shooting enemy tanks and watching them explode in a shower of vector shapes is as enjoyable as ever.



03

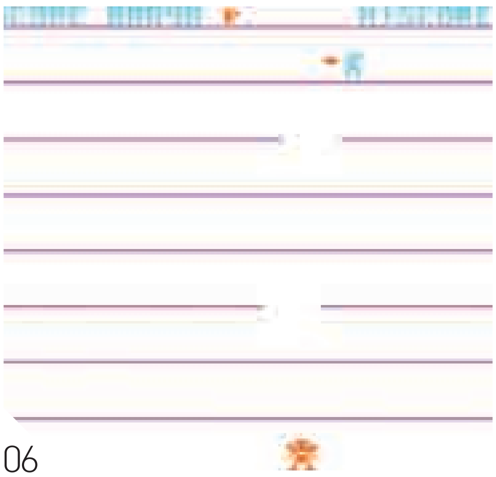


04

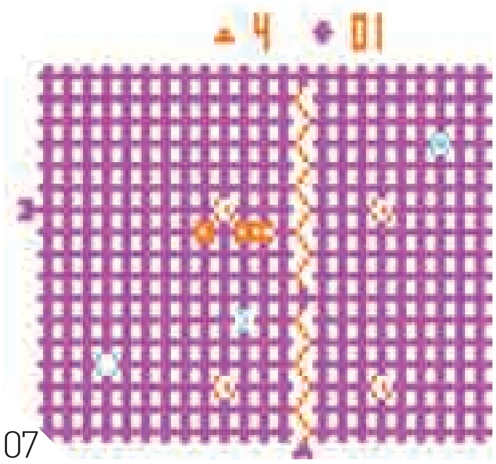


05

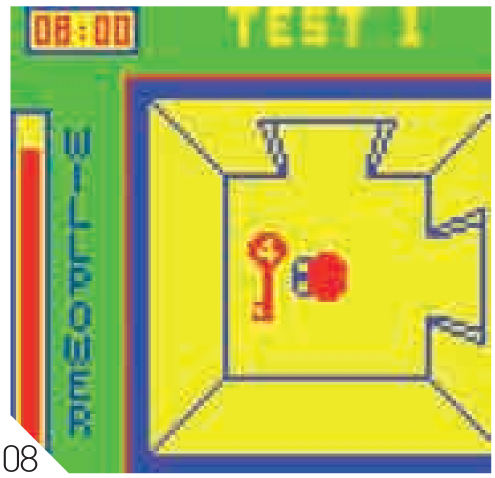




06



07



08

LEGGIT

» **RELEASED:** 1983
» **PUBLISHED BY:** IMAGINE SOFTWARE
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** PEDRO

06 Anyone who has played *Jumping Jack* on the Spectrum will be familiar with this; it's the same game only with a different name – for reasons we can't quite grasp. *Leggit* is often overlooked due to its basic graphics and blip-blip sound effects, but to ignore it on these ground would be madness. The basic premise is to reach the top of each screen by jumping through the gaps in the moving platforms. However, if you bang your head or clash with an enemy it's very likely that you'll get bumped down to the bottom of the screen. So it's try, try and try again. Brilliantly simple and simply brilliant.

GRIDRUNNER

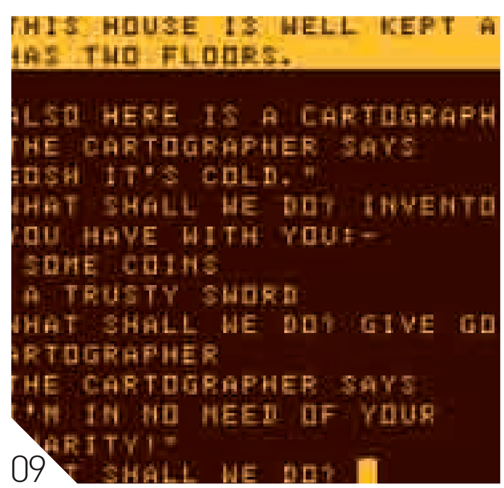
» **RELEASED:** 1983
» **PUBLISHED BY:** SALAMANDER
» **CREATED BY:** JEFF MINTER
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** LAZER ZONE

07 Jeff Minter's *Centipede* remix is a very welcome addition to the Dragon's software catalogue. There's nothing unique about this particular version of the game – the graphics are nice and chunky, looking a lot like the Vic-20 version – but the core gameplay lifts it above many of the competing shooters on the Dragon. Having to blast the space worms that attack from the top of the screen while dodging the debris and avoiding the laser fire from the side and rear, still makes for an intense gaming experience today. For Dragon-owning Yak fans, Salamander also released *Lazer Zone* for the system.

BACKTRACK

» **RELEASED:** 1985
» **PUBLISHED BY:** INCENTIVE
» **CREATED BY:** C M ANDREW
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** MOON CRESTA

08 This little-known maze game is one of the most refreshing titles available for the Dragon. Guide the main character through a warren of interconnecting rooms, searching for the series of keys that are needed to unlock the exit. To complicate matters, the keys must be collected in the correct order, and the first one you need will usually be the last one you find – hence the backtracking of the title. There are also snakes, spiders and other nasties to avoid, and your constantly draining willpower forces you to find food. The presentation is excellent, with a psuedo-3D effect representing the movement between rooms.



09

THE KET TRILOGY

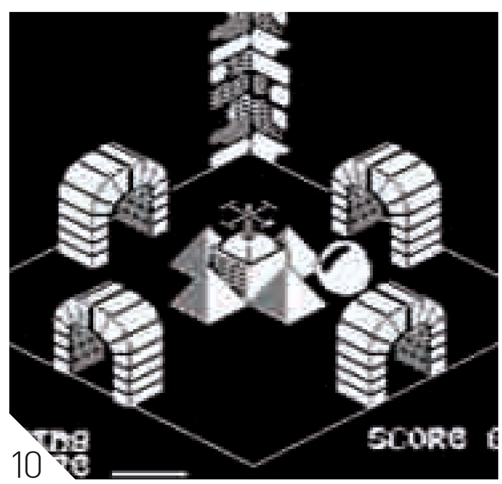
» **RELEASED:** 1985
» **PUBLISHED BY:** INCENTIVE
» **CREATED BY:** J MARTIN AND R MCCORMACK
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** BACKTRACK

09 The Dragon wasn't the best platform for text adventures. There was no lower-case font for a start, so everything was capped up, and because of the resolution limitations, developers couldn't easily add location graphics to text descriptions. For adventure game fans, *The Ket Trilogy* was probably the best bet as it contained three challenging, well-written adventures for one very nice price (it was especially good value when you considered that the three parts were released separately as full-price games for the Spectrum). To round off this quality release, the inlay was adorned with some typically heroic Oli Frey artwork.

AIRBALL

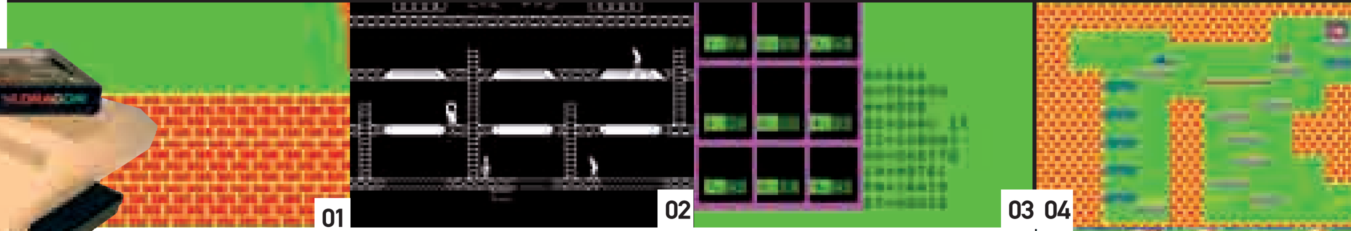
» **RELEASED:** 1987
» **PUBLISHED BY:** MICRODEAL
» **CREATED BY:** ED SCIO
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** ARMOUR-GEDDON (AMIGA/ST)

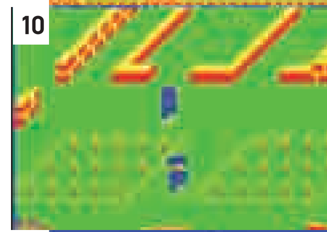
10 Released in 1987, *Airball* proved that there was still a market for quality Dragon software. This isometric adventure sees you rolling a ball around a series of tricky 3D levels, trying to find a mysterious spell book (or something like that – we were always too busy gawping at the graphics to try and figure out what the hell was actually going on). You need only to compare this to any game released on the Dragon in 1982 or 1983 to release what a giant leap forward it represented. It was later ported to several superior systems, including the Amiga, Atari ST, PC and (unofficially) the Game Boy Advance.



10



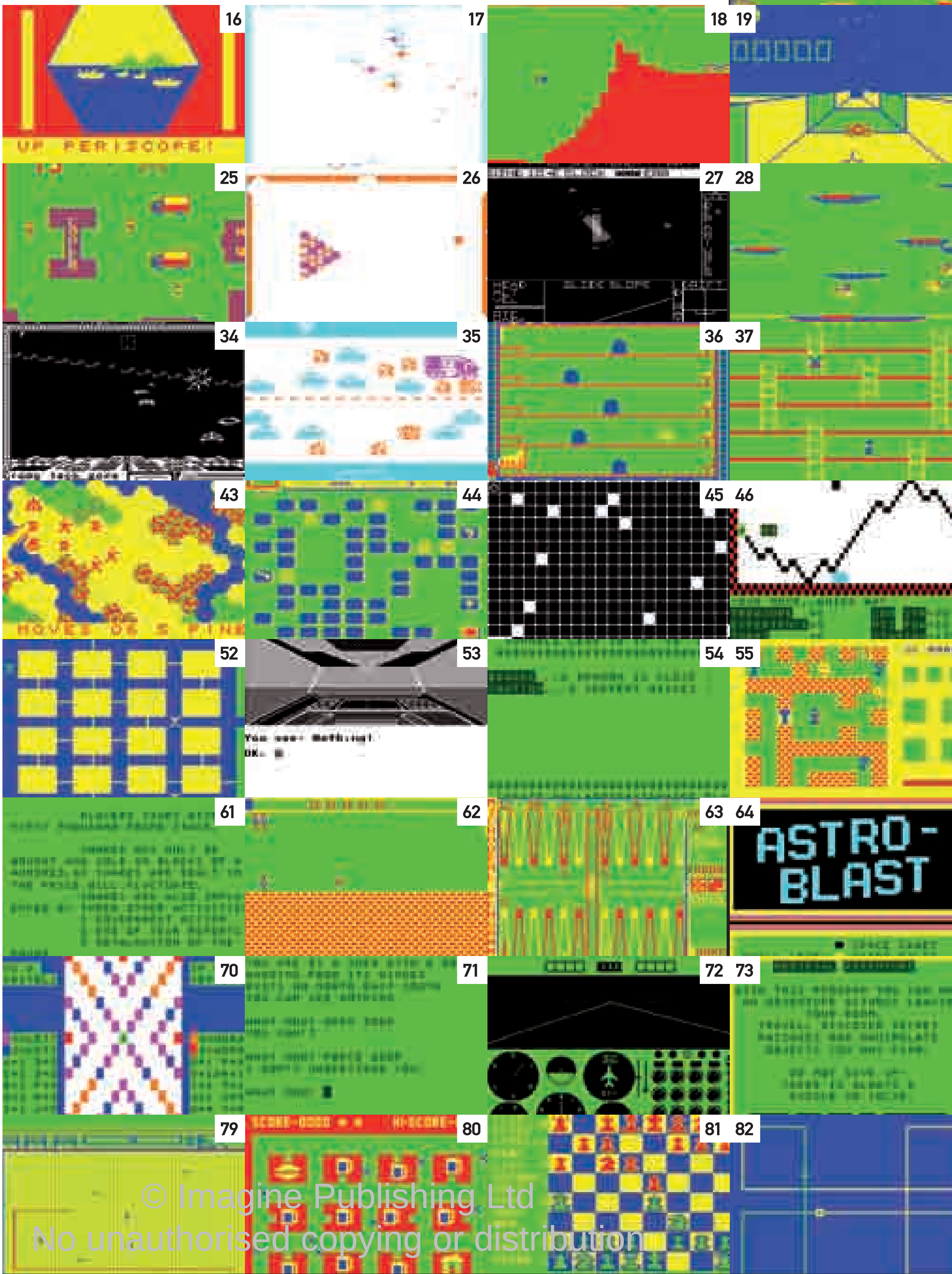


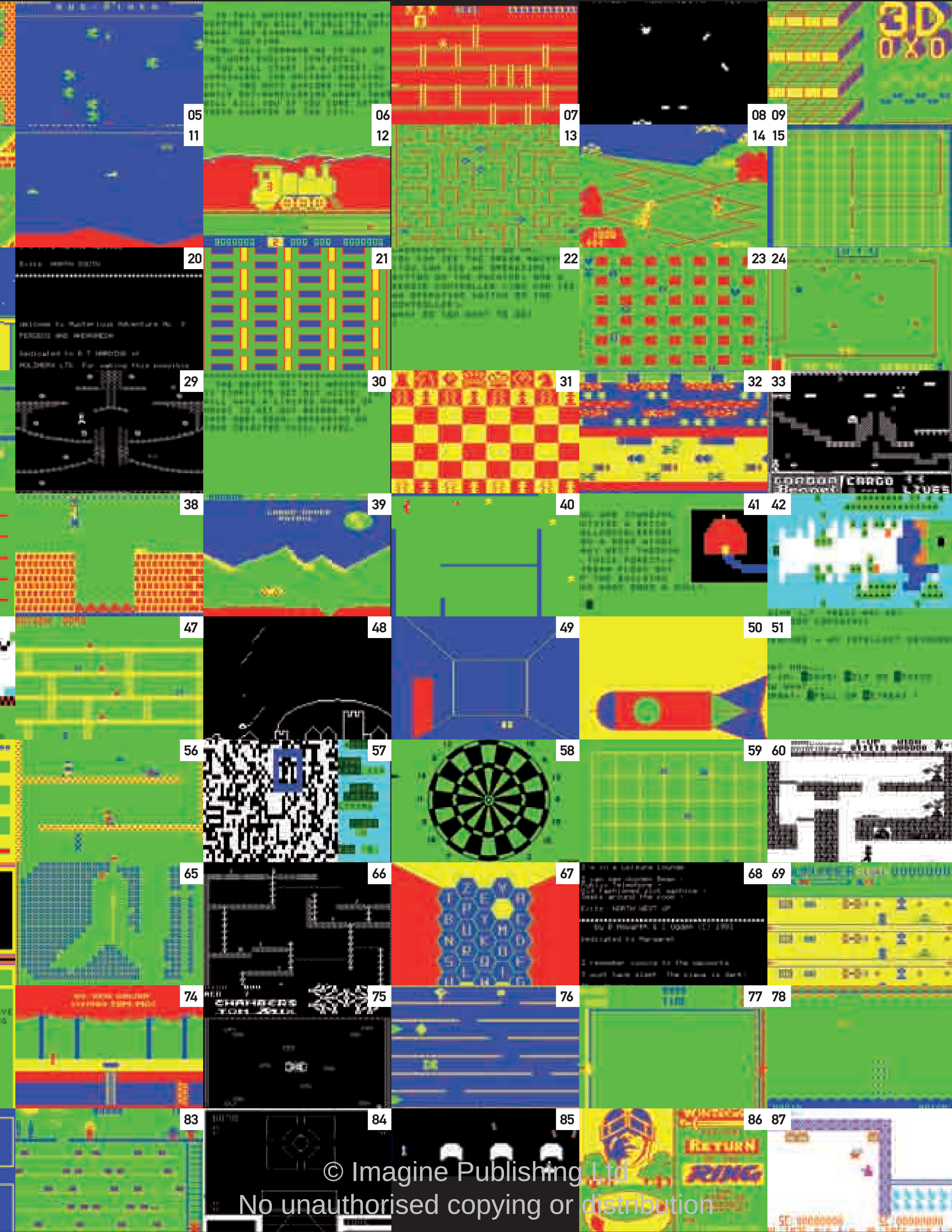


DRAGON 32
and the rest...

What better why to wrap up our Dragon coverage that with two pages of glorious screenshots. Many of these games can be downloaded legally from www.dragon-archive.co.uk. You will need to register however.

- 01 - HUNCHBACK
- 02 - BARMY BURGERS
- 03 - DETECTIVE
- 04 - FINGERS
- 05 - BUG DIVER
- 06 - JERUSALEM
- 07 - MINED OUT
- 08 - MOON CRESTA
- 09 - 3D OXO
- 10 - PEDRO
- 11 - ATTACK
- 12 - 6809 EXPRESS
- 13 - RACEBALL
- 14 - UGH
- 15 - TRUN
- 16 - UP PERISCOPE
- 17 - ARCADIA
- 18 - CAVE FIGHTER
- 19 - LASER RUN
- 20 - PERSEUS AND ANDROMEDA
- 21 - AMAZING
- 22 - DREAM MACHINE
- 23 - STORM ARROWS
- 24 - TEATIME
- 25 - CUTHBERT IN THE COOLER
- 26 - 8 BALL POOL
- 27 - AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL
- 28 - BUZZARD BAIT
- 29 - CASHMAN
- 30 - POSEIDEN
- 31 - CHESS
- 32 - FROGGER
- 33 - GORDON BENNET
- 34 - 3D LUNATTACK
- 35 - HORACE GOES SKIING
- 36 - CHICKEN RUN
- 37 - BONKA
- 38 - CRUSADER
- 39 - LUNAR ROVER PATROL
- 40 - ANDROID ATTACK
- 41 - COLOSSAL CAVE
- 42 - HANDICAP GOLF
- 43 - KRIEGSPIEL
- 44 - RUBY ROBBER
- 45 - SURPRISE
- 46 - THE VALLEY
- 47 - CUTHBERT GOES DIGGING
- 48 - THE TEMPLE OF ZORAN
- 49 - TRANSYLVANIAN TOWER
- 50 - UXB
- 51 - CELLS AND SERPENTS
- 52 - ALCATRAZ 2
- 53 - AQUANAUT
- 54 - THE WHITE BARROWS
- 55 - WIZARDS LAIR
- 56 - DESPERADO DAN
- 57 - SNOW QUEEN
- 58 - DARTS
- 59 - CUTHBERT GOES WALKABOUT
- 60 - SHOCKTROOPER
- 61 - STOCK MARKET
- 62 - THE BELLS
- 63 - BACKGAMMON
- 64 - ASTRO BLAST
- 65 - BEAM RIDER
- 66 - BEANSTALKER
- 67 - BLOCKBUSTER QUIZ
- 68 - WAXWORKS
- 69 - DRAGRUNNER
- 70 - LINKWORD
- 71 - THE TIME MACHINE SEARCH
- 72 - 747 FLIGHT SIMULATOR
- 73 - DEMON KNIGHT
- 74 - CUTHBERT IN THE JUNGLE
- 75 - CHAMBERS
- 76 - BORIS THE BOLD
- 77 - CRAZY FOOTA 2
- 78 - BUBBLE BURSTER
- 79 - TRACE RACER
- 80 - PUB CRAWL
- 81 - DRAGON CHESS
- 82 - CRUISING
- 83 - CUTHBERT IN THE MINE
- 84 - DATATANK
- 85 - SPACE RAIDERS
- 86 - RETURN OF THE RING
- 87 - GLOVE

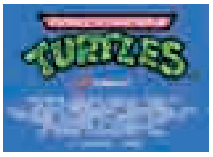



05
06
07
08 09
11
12
13
14 15
20
21
22
23 24
29
30
31
32 33
38
39
40
41 42
47
48
49
50 51
56
57
58
59 60
65
66
67
68 69
74
75
76
77 78
83
84
85
86 87



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

HEROES IN A HALF SHELL... TURTLE POWER!



- **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- **RELEASED:** 1989
- **GENRE:** SCROLLING FIGHTER
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £50+ PCB BOARD



HISTORY

Konami's *Turtles* cabinet certainly cut an imposing presence when it was released in arcades at the backend of the Eighties. Turtle fever was at an all-time high, every other arcade release seemed to be a scrolling fighter of some description, and clever Konami decided to combine the two and reap the generous rewards.

Featuring a graphical style that was based on the popular TV series, *Turtles* oozed charm and character and immediately became the fighter of choice whenever I headed off to Poole arcade, which was virtually every weekend. One of the biggest draws of *Turtles*, was not just the superlative cartoon visuals, a kicking rendition of the TV theme tune and intense, button-mashing combat; no, it was the fact it was one of the few fighters at the time that enabled you to team up with three other friends.

Once the argument over who got to play as Donatello was decided, you could simply concentrate on hammering away at those two fire buttons and laying waste to any foot soldier that was stupid enough to stumble into your path. Yup, *Turtles* may have been relatively simple and had about as much depth as a Smurph's swimming pool, but when you were playing with a group of friends its shortcomings didn't matter in the slightest. Imagine my disappointment then when I downloaded the lag-fest that is *Turtles* on Xbox Live Arcade.

While Digital Eclipse has created yet another stunning arcade conversion that's neigh-on identical to the original coin-op, its online multiplayer is a stuttering mess that leaves a lot to be desired. With the friends I had at the age of 16 now scattered to the four winds, my only chance of reliving the glory days of old is online and that's where the *Turtles* dream becomes a nightmare and a precious memory that I've harboured for a good 18 years gets cruelly shattered. With its heart now ripped out, *Turtles* has become an empty husk of its former self and will no doubt have a new generation of gamers wondering what all the fuss was about. What a shame.



THE MAKING OF…

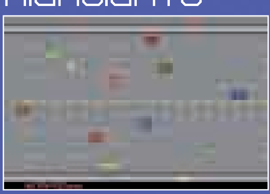
PITFALL II: LOST CAVERNS

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
» **DEVELOPER:** DAVID CRANE
» **RELEASED:** 1984
» **GENRE:** PLATFORM GAME
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £15+

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS



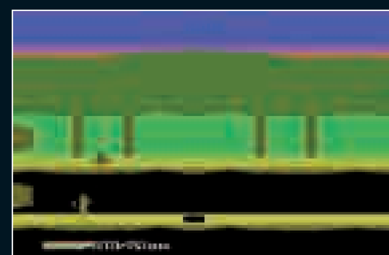
FREEWAY
SYSTEMS: ATARI 2600
YEAR: 1981

GHOSTBUSTERS
SYSTEMS: AMSTRAD CPC, APPLE II, ATARI 2600, ATARI 800/XL/XE, COMMODORE 64, MSX, NES, SEGA MASTER SYSTEM, ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1985–89

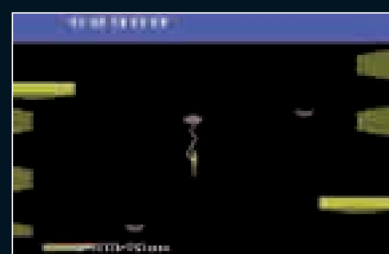
LITTLE COMPUTER PEOPLE
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, AMSTRAD CPC, APPLE II, COMMODORE 64, ZX SPECTRUM (128K)
YEAR: 1985–6

When you've kick-started a genre, pushed a console to its limits, and sold four million copies of your game, the only way is up – at least according to David Crane, who reveals to Craig Grannell the secrets behind the development of his sequel to Pitfall!

Pitfall Harry's fortunes may have waned in recent years, but for a short time he was a videogame megastar. The original *Pitfall!* was one of the Atari 2600's most advanced and playable games, and with it selling four million copies, it's hardly surprising that a sequel soon rumbled into production. If the original wowed its audience, programmer David Crane was determined to blow them away with the sequel, and also provide gamers with a new experience, rather than serving up more of the same. "It's important for any sequel to stand alone," begins David, recalling his initial thinking while working on *Pitfall II*. "It has to be entertaining, even if the player has never seen the original." The initial concept David settled on was designing a new game based on the character Pitfall Harry, but not a direct continuation of the *Pitfall!* story. "To remain true to the original, Pitfall Harry had to be exploring and collecting treasure, but I wanted to put him in a new environment – everything in the game came from that desire."



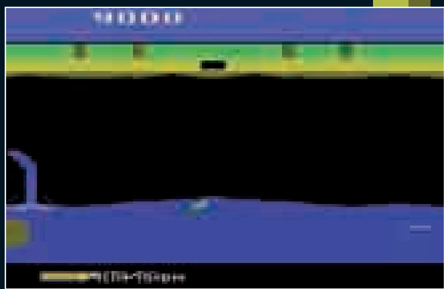
» Harry took in the pleasant sunset, seriously considering leaving his niece and her cat to their grisly fates.



» A huge Nena fan, Harry was secretly disappointed the balloon wasn't entirely red, and that there weren't 98 more.

However, by the time development on the sequel began, the Atari 2600 had survived far longer than anyone had expected, and David's ideas were too much for the original hardware; he rectified this by creating some new hardware of his own. "We recognised that every game we developed could be the last, but since we were always being proved wrong, I decided to make an investment in the 2600's possible future," recalls David. "I designed special circuitry that could be built into a game cartridge, significantly enhancing the power of the Atari 2600."

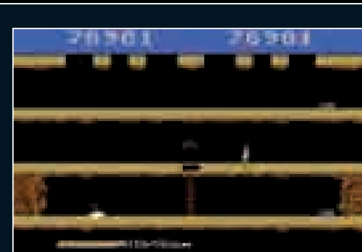
David's creation became known as the Display Processor Chip or 'DPC', and he notes that many of *Pitfall II*'s advanced features were a direct result of the chip. "At Activision, we always felt pushed from behind by our own innovations. You had to be ambitious to keep inventing new ways to make games fun. The new circuitry added extra graphics capabilities and four-voice music to the Atari 2600," says David. Sadly, the 2600's reign finally came to an end, and *Pitfall II* was the first and only game to use a DPC-enhanced cartridge. Despite this, the effort was still



» Harry admired the scenic underground waterfall, once again forgetting to change into swimwear before taking a dip.



"I DESIGNED SPECIAL CIRCUITRY THAT COULD BE BUILT INTO A GAME CARTRIDGE, SIGNIFICANTLY ENHANCING THE POWER OF THE ATARI 2600" DAVID CRANE



» As Harry avoided psychotic ants and bats, he decided the bolted-on second quest was a rather better deal for gamers than himself.

worthwhile, massively adding to the scope of David's work-in-progress creation. For example, unlike the original *Pitfall!*, which is a horizontal flick-screen effort, the sequel features vertical scrolling. "This was made possible by the DPC, but I designed the cavern to allow for the expansion of Harry's adventure," explains David, highlighting how technical skills and gameplay considerations went hand-in-hand when he was working on games. "Harry already knew how to run, jump and climb. I also wanted him to swim and to fly – balloon-aided, of course!"

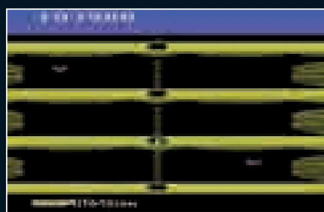
A quest element was added, with Harry tasked in locating his adventure-hungry niece, Rhonda, their cowardly cat, Quickclaw, a stone-aged rat (for a university research project, apparently), along with the priceless Raj diamond (clearly, Harry's mountains of gold hadn't sated his kleptomaniac instincts). Rhonda and Quickclaw actually started life away from the computer screen, originally introduced in the CBS cartoon show *Saturday Supercade*; David including them in his game was an early example of cross-media brand awareness. "The animated series and game were in development at the same time. While there were many products that carried the *Pitfall!* licence for purely marketing purposes, I wanted the animated series to have closer ties to the game," explains David. "We collaborated on several features, so that the series would feel like an extension of the adventure begun in the game."

Although Harry's quest was the main aspect of the game's plot, also adding an important extra dimension to the game, David notes that it was never intended to overshadow Harry's treasure-collecting obsession: "Collecting treasure was always a goal since that provided you with your score – having a score is the only way to let you compare your skills from one session to another." And, like the original *Pitfall!*, *Pitfall II* is essentially a high-score game. Like its prequel, you start with points on the board, some of which are deducted each time Harry comes a cropper. However, unlike the original game, Harry is essentially immortal: instead of losing a life upon colliding with one of the cavern's many beasties, Harry is returned to the most recent red cross he stepped on, only losing points along the way. "This was the genesis of the 'continue' function found in most games today," claims David. "This new *Pitfall!* adventure was longer than past games, and so I wanted to break it into manageable segments; the 'red cross' symbolised a safe zone, and provided a graphical way to indicate the start of a new segment." Amusingly, the soundtrack changes during Harry's journey back to a cross, becoming darker in tone. "That may have been the first time a soundtrack was used to convey mood in a videogame," considers David. The music also provided another link with the *Pitfall!* cartoon, as David explains: "I faithfully reproduced the soundtrack written for the animated series, and then rewrote it in a minor key to convey the sombre mood when Harry was harmed and sent back to the last cross."

When asked whether anything was omitted from the game, David thinks not. "When designing a game within tight

THE MAKING OF...

PITFALL II: LOST CAVERNS



» Harry decided that what this place really needed was a few handy lifts.



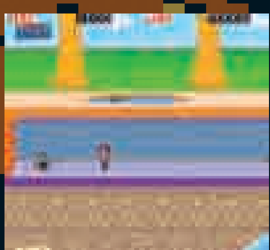
» For good luck, rich locals had taken to lobbing gold bars into the water, rather than the odd coin.



» Rhonda, ever the grumpy teen, sulked, hands in pockets, as Harry told her off for getting lost.



» Quickclaw didn't improve his chances of rescue by yelling, "I'm over here, stupid!"



» Pitfall Harry finds a big bag of money – something most players need to get anywhere in this unforgiving conversion.

PITFALL!'S BIGGER BROTHER

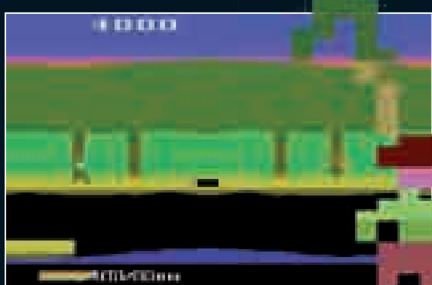
Although the original *Pitfall!* and its sequel eventually made it to a range of home consoles and computer systems, *Lost Caverns* made the leap from the home to the arcades. Sega's mid-Eighties arcade machine, sharing a name with Crane's sequel, and borrowing gameplay elements from both Activision games, was something of an anomaly at the time. Sadly, David had nothing to do with it, and this shows in the final product, which, despite neat, cartoon-like graphics, is frustrating. "The game was developed while I was at Activision, but it was commissioned by the licensing department," recalls David. "The same people who were having *Pitfall!* board games arranged for an arcade company to develop their own game, and this was something of a milestone, taking a home game to the arcades."

constraints, you keep adding features until you're using ten per cent more ROM than what's available. Then begins a process of rewriting code segments more efficiently until the game fits in the available space," he explains. "Since you're forced to stop adding features by memory constraints, you seldom have anything in mind that has to be left out. In addition, you have to remember that this is a business – if you never finish a game, nobody can buy it and play it! So we never sat around, agonising about additional features – once a game was fun and fitted the ROM, it was time to get it out to market."

Although nothing more could be crammed into the Atari 2600 version, that wasn't the case for some of the conversions. While most home systems got *Pitfall II* with a graphics boost, the 8-bit Atari releases had an entirely new quest bolted on. "This is one of the more interesting stories in the history of videogame ports," says David. "With the success of *Pitfall II*, we decided to make versions for the C64 and Atari 800. Both those machines are based on the same microprocessor as the 2600, and both have more display capability than the 2600, and so the ports should have been straightforward." Two programmers were assigned – one for each system – and David recalls Tim Shotter, responsible for the C64 version, took a traditional approach, writing the game from scratch using the completed 2600 release as a specification. Elsewhere, Mike Lorenzen, tried something new: writing display code for the Atari 800 that replaced the 2600 display routines, and otherwise using David's original game code intact. "Both projects reached beta at the same time, but because the C64 version had been written from scratch, the code needed debugging – as all games do," recalls David. "On the other hand, since the Atari 800 version started with fully debugged code, Mike's game went from beta to final in a day, and so he spent the month that would have been taken up debugging to add an entirely original level that opens only when you complete the first one." This new level features a more intricate map than David's original, and tougher gameplay, due to speedy and deadly bats, piranhas and ants. It also has its own quest, tasking Harry with finding a friend and collecting a hat, flute and rope; once everything's found, a surreal scene shows the rope being charmed, climbing ever upwards, enabling Harry and friends to escape the caverns. "This experience taught us a lot about porting games, and as an added benefit made the Atari 800 version a much better game," reckons David.

Critical reaction to *Pitfall II* was positive, notably for the Atari versions, with the 2600 release rightly being considered a benchmark for quality on the system. However, David notes: "It may seem ironic, but the relative success of a game in the market is secondary to the game. By that I mean that we all want our games to be successful, and if they are not profitable we won't be







FROM SCREEN TO… SCREEN

As shown elsewhere in this feature, *Pitfall!* made it to the arcades, one of the few home videogames to do so. However, such was the pull of the *Pitfall!* brand at the time, Pitfall Harry also ended up appearing on the CBS animated cartoon *Saturday Supercade*, alongside other well-known gaming stars Frogger, Donkey Kong, Mario and the motley crew from *Q*Bert*.

"The animated series came about long after the success of the original game," explains David. "In fact, I was working on *Pitfall II: Lost Caverns* at the time." David notes that he even seriously considered doing the voice characterisation for the animated lead character ("my Pitfall Harry sounded a little like 'Dudley Do-Right'!"), and says that crossover with his in-progress game was definitely intentional: "There was collaboration between the products: the game ended up featuring the characters from the animated series as well as the theme song."

MORE IN THIS SERIES

PITFALL!
SUPER PITFALL
PITFALL: THE MAYAN ADVENTURE
PITFALL 3D: BEYOND THE JUNGLE
PITFALL: THE LOST EXPEDITION

long in the business. But the difference between 'successful' and 'wildly successful' is not important to the game designer – once we've made the game as good as we can, we send it off and move on to something else fun."

Of course, if there's nothing 'fun' on the horizon, programmers often make more drastic moves, as David discovered a few years later. Despite continuing to break new ground at Activision, notably with *Little Computer People*, he eventually quit the company. "In 1987, Activision's new management was trying to redefine the company as a producer of 'productivity software' – what a mistake," laughs David. "By then, there were few game projects in the works, and I left just about the time that a new *Pitfall!* game would have been well accepted." Because of this, David had no involvement with any of the follow-ups to his *Pitfall!* games, such as the dire NES effort *Super Pitfall*, the Flashback-style *Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure*, and the more recent 3D efforts that barely have anything to do with the original Atari games.

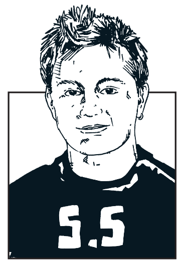
> "YOU HAVE TO REMEMBER THAT THIS IS A BUSINESS; IF YOU NEVER FINISH A GAME, NOBODY CAN BUY IT AND PLAY IT!" DAVID CRANE

David is now Chief Technical Officer at Skyworks Technologies, a company he co-founded with Garry Kitchen and over 30 other successful entrepreneurs and technologists. As the industry evolved, those at Skyworks noted how the one-man-one-game scenario had changed into one where dozens of people and weeks were required to work on a game. "This was natural, as available memory for games grew exponentially to more than 300,000 times that available for our Atari 2600 games," says David. "But I never believed these mega-games were more fun than a good single-screen action game." With that mentality, Skyworks started developing 'casual' games for the internet, funded by advertising revenue from sponsors. "We came to view the internet as the latest videogame system, and with limited bandwidth this new 'game system' is like the systems of the past," explains David. "We trade off memory, graphics, processor speed, and download time, just like in the old days. While this stops some in their tracks, we find it a challenge as stimulating as those we enjoyed in the past!" But despite these new challenges, David still remains especially fond of *Pitfall II*: "Working on *Pitfall II* was more fun than any other game I developed. I'm an electronic engineer by training, and I got into videogames in spite of that, but I really enjoy dabbling in electronics between games. Defining circuitry that expanded the capabilities of the 2600 was the most fun I had in the Eighties – and in that case, I got to develop hardware and software in conjunction with one another."

BOSS/RUSH

WHEN WE SQUARE UP TO THAT END-OF-LEVEL BADDIE FROM YESTERYEAR...

THE NINJA'S WORST NIGHTMARE



The ninja has provided an invaluable main character stereotype for game developers to draw on for many a long year, but what with the super human qualities that tend to quickly accumulate after a few months dedicated shuriken practice, finding an end of level boss capable (and worthy) of finishing off an established shadow warrior is no small task. Here we take a furtive look back at some of the toughest and most bizarre nemeses the arcade dwelling ninja has ever had to face.







» Shadow Dancer takes the phrase "I feel like I've been hit by a train" a bit too literally.

SHADOW DANCER

» **SYSTEM:** ARCADE » **RELEASED:** 1989 » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE

What with having a faithful companion at your heel (mine was called Susan) and a snazzy white costume (reminiscent of Sho Kosugi's getup in the B-movie classic, *Nine Deaths Of The Ninja*) the Shinobi sequel is held in moderately high regard. But retreading Hayate's invisible ninjitsu footsteps, it seems those wickedly diverse end of level bosses have become somewhat kitsch. A cruel thing to say to the once menacing, yet now distinctly comical, freight train from the end of *Shadow Dancer*'s level two, but time has certainly tamed it.

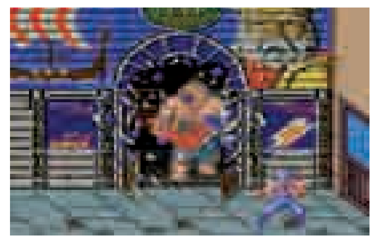
Bouncing two inch shuriken off a 20 tonne iron behemoth is almost as daft as standing in front of the damn thing in the first place. This particular ninja's nemesis begs the question, "Why doesn't Shinobi just go around the side and kill the driver?", and yet you're forced to stand there trying to lodge a star in the train's piffling headlights. It's gotta hurt, getting hit by a train, though.

SHADOW WARRIORS

» **SYSTEM:** ARCADE » **RELEASED:** 1988 » **PUBLISHER:** TECMO » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE

The sprightly, brightly coloured ninjas of *Shadow Warriors* (also known as *Ninja Gaiden* in the US, and *Ninja Ryukenden* in Japan) faced down more than a few diverse enemies during their first trip to America, though level one's boss is probably the most scary.

Unfortunately, the fear and trepidation this enormous, hulking sumo wrestler invokes is not particularly due to his impressive girth (oo-er). Rather, he seems to be painted lavishly with disturbingly whorish make-up. It doesn't mean he can't kick and punch with the best of them, and he's actually one of the tougher opponents the Shadow Warriors face, though it's hard not to think of the game as "Eye Shadow Warriors" once his path has been well and truly crossed.



» The level one boss in *Shadow Warriors* might be a big fat tranny, but who's gonna tell him?







THE NINJA WARRIORS

» **SYSTEM:** ARCADE » **RELEASED:** 1987 » **PUBLISHER:** TAITO » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE

Although not an entirely remarkable game, *The Ninja Warriors* triple monitor cabinet, sharp graphics, detailed animation and memorable music made up in technicalities what it lacked in gameplay.

Shuffling steadily from left to right, the cybernetic ninjas are suddenly and inexplicable assailed by random explosions. It soon becomes clear the army has called in the big boys, as a full sized armoured tank rolls into the extra-widescreen vista. Naturally, knives are no match for an iron horse, and it took more than a few credits to finally thwart the man at the helm as he tentatively popped his head up.

In an otherwise lacklustre game, the recurring tank presented a great alternative to hackin' and slashin', requiring the player to think – albeit for a second or two – about the best way to assassinate the mark: the sign of a true ninja.





» After launching a few shells at you from a safe distance (as per established US military tactics), the tank rolls into view, then stalks The Ninja Warriors to the end of the level.









» Although it's a great battle when the Turtles finally face down Shredder, it's also kinda confusing. Two Shredders? One without a mask? I'm off back to the sewers.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

» **SYSTEM:** ARCADE » **RELEASED:** 1989 » **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE

Probably the most famous ninjas of all time, and not just inclusive of videogames, extra special mention must go to the final battle in Konami's greatest homage to the heroes in a half-shell.

The anthropomorphic reptiles chase the dastardly evil doer all across Manhatten and finally corner him in Krang's Technodrome in Dimension X (cowabunga, dude!) until facing him down after what's actually a pretty easy battle against Krang himself. For some reason, there's two Shredders (presumably some kind of self-duplication trick we see ninjas regularly perform), and after avoiding his patented reducer ray a few times and beating up both evil ninjas concurrently, the Technodrome explodes in a ball of flame.
Turtle power, baby!

NINJA SPIRIT

» **SYSTEM:** ARCADE » **RELEASED:** 1988 » **PUBLISHER:** IREM » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE

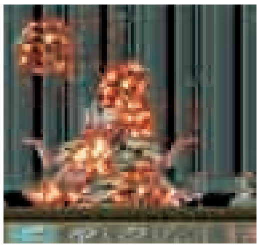
One of the most well known titles to cast the ninja character in a platformer environment, *Ninja Spirit* certainly invokes more than a few impressively malevolent enemy apparitions.

Timing conspired to hide *Ninja Spirit* from the public eye, it being sandwiched between landmark games like *Shinobi* and *Final Fight*, but as far as classic boss battles go, there's little to compare with the end of level one, when a Buddhist style God figure – standing at least six times the height of Moonlight (our protagonist ninja) – appears and starts chucking lightening bolts about the place.

It's difficult to tell precisely which deity this superbly detailed and fearsome opponent represents, though it most closely resembles Sanmen Daikokuten (a war deity who conquers evil), though it could possibly represent Ashura (a powerful and fierce form of demigod). Either way, he's bloody difficult to kill in the excellent *Ninja Spirit*.



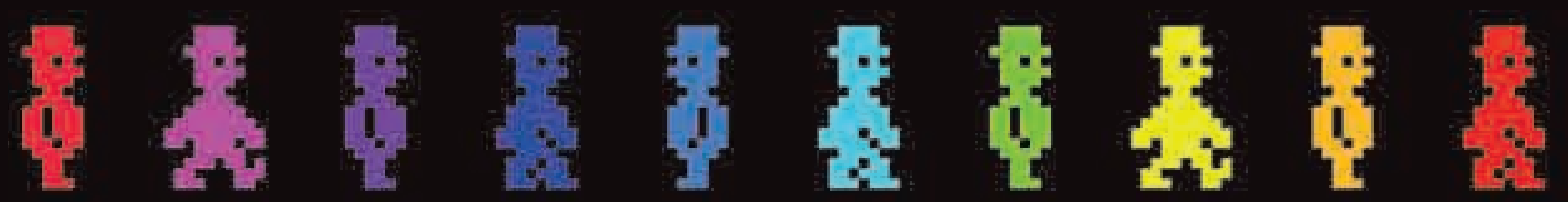
» "If, on your journey, you should encounter God, God will be cut." – Hattori Hanzo, *Kill Bill*. I think that quote applies here, too.





THE MAKING OF...

JET SET WILLY ONLINE



Forget Jet Set Willy II's Final Frontier as Miner Willy's latest adventure is easily his greatest yet. Darran Jones talks to the creators of Jet Set Willy Online while trying to avoid as many knob jokes as possible

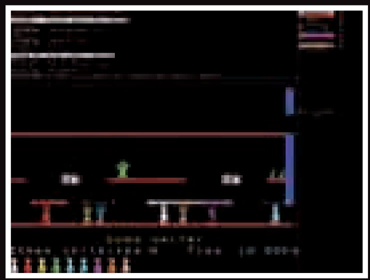
Matthew Smith's *Jet Set Willy* has enthralled a generation of gamers for over 22 years, with a recent survey by top US statisticians confirming that the intrepid miner's second game is played by 62 and a half people every 37 minutes. Okay, so maybe that statement is about as real as the completed version of the Megatree that's believed to be hidden down the side of Smith's favourite armchair (we can't be sure), but no one can deny that after two decades Miner Willy remains one of the industry's most beloved characters.

Shuffle down the murky paths of World Of Spectrum (with *The Blue Danube* playing cheerfully in the back of your mind) and you'll discover a staggering number of tributes to *Jet Set Willy*. Indeed there were so many to choose from that we lost count after ten – the maximum number of digits available for us to count on. Fortunately, one quick forum post revealed that the intrepid miner has appeared in over 60 different fan creations on the Spectrum alone. An impressive figure and no mistake. But what happens when you become bored with all those available games and need a new fix? What happens when *Willy's Hoard*, *The Deadly Mission*, *Fantasy World Willy* and *Maria Vs Some Bastards* (no really) no longer have anything to offer? Well, you take the hero to the masses of course…

"As Barry Gibb once said: I started a joke," begins Scott Watson who created some of *JSWO*'s rooms and co-shared the idea in the first place. "Bob [Fearon] and myself were chatting on MSN late one night as I was just back from the pub after a few bevvies." Retro Gamer has always found that alcohol-fuelled stories are always the most revealing, so we sat ourselves down and allowed Watson to continue digging himself into an entertaining interview hole. "So anyway, I can't remember the exact conversation but it was something along the lines of how most modern games are generic pish and how everything appears to be going online. Like two old coffin dodgers we started banging on about how they don't make 'em like they used to, and I said to Bob, 'wouldn't *JSW* be superb online? Imagine watching someone suffering from infinite deaths. That would be one of the funniest things ever.' An hour later and Bob's only gone and mocked up some hilarious screens of what it would look like. The rest, as they say, is history…"

Now that we've finally seen someone stuck in an infinite deaths routine for ourselves we can confirm that it is indeed one of the funniest things online. Granted, it's not quite as hilarious as the Punchy or Dig Dug: The Movie videos that are currently doing the rounds on YouTube, but it's very amusing nonetheless.

But we're sliding down a steep tangent, and co-creator Bob Fearon has his own side of the story to tell, so let's hear him



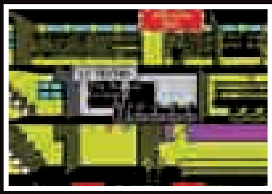
» Magic Knight and Miner Willy. Together at last.

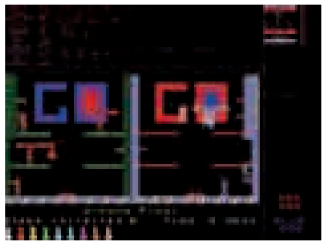


» The lobby: This is where all the magic begins.

THE FUTURE'S BRIGHT, THE FUTURE'S ONLINE

With *Jet Set Willy Online* proving to be so successful we were interested to know if the boys had any other favourite 8-bit hits that they wanted to exploit. We've already pitched an online Xbox Live Arcade version of *Sabre Wulf* to Rare, but in the meantime, here's some other games that Storey and the rest of the boys are currently thinking of. "There's just too many to mention," he begins. "*Skool Daze* would obviously be fantastic, *Paradroid*, *Dynamite Dan*, *Chuckie Egg*, *Technician Ted*, the list just goes on and on. There has already been talk about actually doing *Skool Daze*, so let's keep our fingers crossed on that one."





» Reach the top before the other team does.

"I SAID WOULDN'T JSW BE SUPERB ONLINE? IMAGINE WATCHING SOMEONE SUFFERING INFINITE DEATHS. AN HOUR LATER AND BOB'S ONLY GONE AND MOCKED UP SOME HILARIOUS SCREENS" SCOTT WATSON

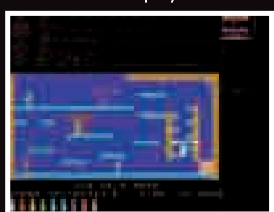
THE MAKING OF…

JET SET WILLY ONLINE



MISSING IN ACTION

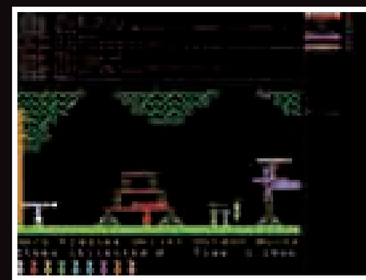
While the team has tried to make *Jet Set Willy Online* as authentic as possible, there were a few changes that had to be made in order to make the game more suitable for online play. Some are relatively major, some you won't even notice, but as Collier explains: what works offline, doesn't necessarily work when more players are involved. "The collapsible tiles are the first thing that people notice," he admits. "Obviously they just wouldn't have worked in multiplay, so we had to take them out. The first-person perspective using the latest pixel shaders was also left out for obvious reasons, while the single-player end sequence was dropped for the simple fact that it just wasn't needed, it is multiplayer after all."



shoot from the virtual hip. "So there I was with Scott talking about what it'd be like if *Jet Set Willy* had been created in today's gaming climate, and the little cogs in my brain started to whirr. One Photoshop hack-job later, and we had a bunch of mock screenshots together, which we figured would be perfect for *Way Of The Rodent* (http://www.wayoftherodent.com/bonus/JSWOnline.htm). Anyway, the screenshots got published and the next thing we know there are a fair few people saying they'd actually really like to play it.

Enter Trev [Trevor Storey] and Stu [Stuart Collier] a few weeks later with the idea of actually making our concept a reality." Storey and Collier are no strangers to the remake scene and have already appeared in Retro Gamer several times over, but despite the latent talents of everyone involved, the boys would discover that taking Miner Willy beyond 'the final frontier' wasn't going to be as easy as some of the other remakes they had tackled in the past. "Well, to be fair the actual editor only took a couple of days to create and was done straight away as the other guys needed to get cracking on the maps and graphics," reveals Collier. In typical journo fashion, we were trying to gain insight into the turmoil of one man's discovery of himself in the face of adversity, however, it was quickly revealed that the game's creation was a piece of piss. Thanks a lot, Stuart.

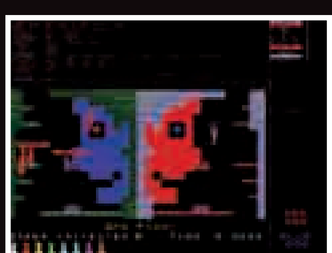
Anyway, please continue. "Well, the basic game engine took a few more weeks to complete," Ha! We knew there was personal conflict to be found in there somewhere. Do go on, Stuart: "and I refrained from looking at the original code in favour of just playing the game and observing the behaviour, although I did end up using the rope-swinging data," he sheepishly admits. "The main problem that I encountered was of course the actual network code. Not having a lot of time or experience with network code, I really didn't want to roll my own code and a quick search on the net revealed quite a number of pre-made and, better still, free libraries to choose from." So the network coding didn't prove that difficult at all then? Come on, Stuart, we're trying to uncover a revealing exposé here. "No, no, let me continue, there were still problems to be solved." Good. "The first release of the code, for example, was a complete disaster [well, at least from a programming perspective], as the game would crash whenever a new player tried to join a game that was already in progress," continues an unruffled Collier. "The network DLL that I had been using was DXplay and the library just wasn't up to the actual task and indeed, the developers had stopped supporting it some months before. I therefore had to start my research all over again and finally hit upon RakNet, which ticked all the right boxes and, thankfully, worked straight out of the box so to speak. Luckily, I'd made the network code modular so it didn't take too long to re-issue a working version. I also took the extra time to tidy up existing network code and tighten the protocols used."



» Much better than the Krypton Factor's obstacle course.

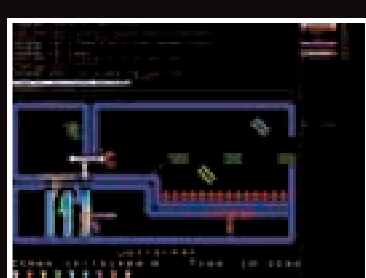


"MY ONLINE CODING ABILITIES ARE NON-EXISTENT BUT I KNEW THAT IF ANYONE WAS GOING TO MAKE JSWO WORK IT WAS GOING TO BE OVINE'S STU, THE MAN'S A CODING DEMON" BOB FEARON



» More tower climbing shenanigans.

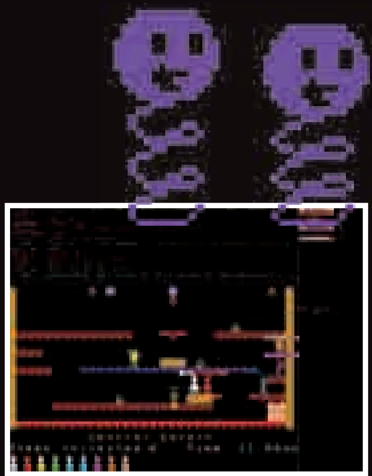




» Mess up in Prison Break and it's back to the start.



» You'll need some pixel perfect skills to negotiate this section.



» Rushing through these *Manic Miner* levels is great fun.

Collier may have had initial difficulty with the network coding, but no such problems existed for Storey. "Art wise it was all pretty simple really," he confirms. "I ripped the sprites from the Commodore 64 version, the backgrounds were done by playing the game and looking for new tiles we needed then taking screen grabs, it only really took me a few hour to do. Once Stu built the editor, we flew through the main rooms in just a couple of weeks, then we just kept adding new games and new Willy sprites until we thought right that's enough." Yes, we were as shocked as you no doubt are when we discovered that Storey had used Commodore sprites when a perfectly good Amstrad version of the game exists (please send all your complaints to: Retro Gamer, Freepost SOD OFF). But after playing the completed product, we'll forgive him for this major transgression and, let's face it, with the amount of work going on, we can mostly forgive the lads for having the occasional, serious lapse in judgement.

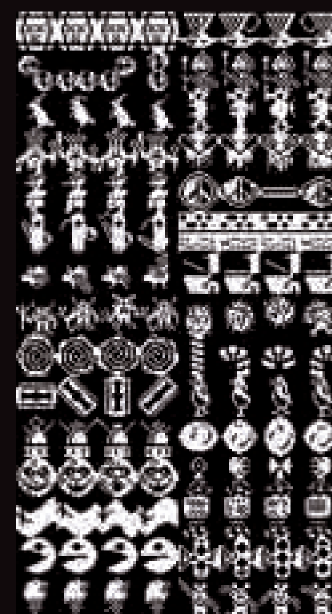
Of course, one thing that's always interesting with a title such as this is how on earth do these guys manage to communicate so effectively with each other? With the team scattered to the four winds, it's not as though they can all get together for a quick chat in their local. Storey reveals that it's all about clever time management. He could be lying, of course, but he was quite convincing when he told us. "With there being four of us working on the game, I decided to organise everything by giving a number to each room so people didn't stand on each other's toes. We are all regulars on MSN and IRC channels as well as the retro remakes forum, so being miles away from each other didn't matter in the slightest. We had poor old Stu on hand to do our bidding, adding new bits to the editor whenever we needed it and importing new graphics when they were completed. So everything was pretty straightforward. The only difficult bit was trying to explain really awkward bugs, where the simplest of explanations turned into novel-sized emails. Didn't they, Stu…"

The coding of the actual game may have proved relatively straightforward in the end, but initially, the biggest problems for the boys was visualising how an online version of *Jet Set Willy* was actually going to work. Granted, the mock-ups created by Fearon revealed that the lightning was there for all to see, but how on earth did the lads manage to bottle it? "At first I honestly had no clue how we'd actually go about creating a proper online *Jet Set Willy*," admits Watson. "Luckily, after the Rodent article came out about the mock-ups the whole thing started to snowball and the comments began coming thick and fast. I've no problem with creating platformers, but unfortunately, my online coding abilities are non-existent, and while I gave it a shot nothing was really happening." Fearon found himself in a similar quandary, but stood staunch, secure in the knowledge that it was the results that ultimately mattered. "Hell, I was as clueless as everyone else," he admits rashly. "But it was worth a go, and let's face it, it's better to have tried and failed than not try at all. I knew, though, that if anyone was going to make *JSWO* work it was going to be Ovine's Stu, the man's a coding demon."

While Fearon and Watson may have been unsure about *JSWO's* potential, Collier and Storey's vision for, the Miner's online exploits were more self-assured. It may have been their coding experience, or it may have just been something in the water. Hell, it could just be because they've got bigger balls than King Kong, but Collier tells us that he always knew Fearon and Watson's wild idea would be a success. "I had confidence right from the start," Collier assures us with a twinkle in his eye. "Everyone was really fired up for the project and motivation was incredibly high. Frequent meetings online to test and swap ideas kept that initial motivation going and the completion of the project was assured." "Hell yeah," agrees Storey. "As soon as I saw those mock-ups that had been created I just constantly hassled everyone involved until it was finally finished. And



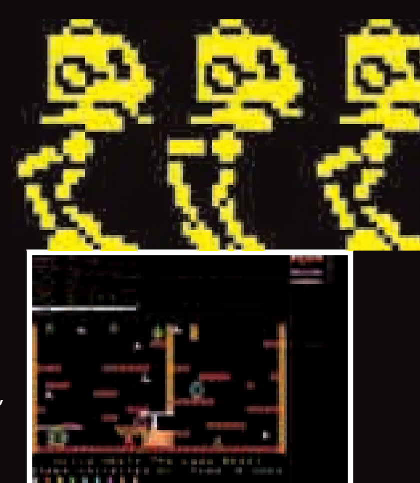
» Forum member markopoloman (MPM) dashes to the exit.



» A selection of the enemy sprites that appear in *Jet Set Willy Online*. How many do you remember?



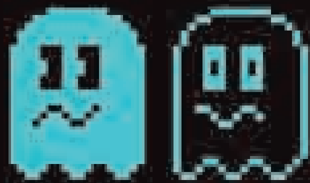
» If there's a better version of *Jet Set Willy*, we've not played it.



» It took us absolutely ages to jump that blue log.

THE MAKING OF…

JET SET WILLY ONLINE

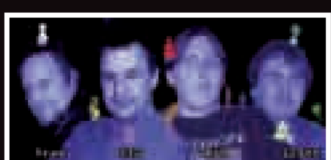


SO MANY GAME MODES, SO LITTLE TIME

There's a staggering number of sub-games in *Jet Set Willy Online*. Being far too lazy to play them all ourselves, we got Storey to give us a brief description of each mode. Of course we did play though a few and one of our favourites was the amazing "Willy Tag" which sees up to 15 other Willys all racing after one poor sod. It's fantastic fun to play and normally ends up in multiple infinite deaths, when players have a critical lapse of judgement.

Collect x items: First to collect x amount of objects wins
Timed games: Person to collect the most objects wins
Race to games: First to a certain room wins
Willy tag: One person is 'it' and must tag people, they will also become 'it', last person wins
Golden Willy: First to find the golden Willy wins
British Bulldog: One person is 'it', first to tag him wins
Pitfall Willy: A race to the temple across pitfall-like screens
Assault Course: First to collect the item wins
Manic Willy: Manic miner rooms, first to the end wins
Jail Break: First to escape and get the item wins
The Laboratory: First to collect item wins
Discovery: First person to visit x amount of rooms wins
Chain: First to visit certain rooms wins
Team Collect: First team to collect x amount of items wins
Capture the Flag: First team to opposite flag wins
Dark Tower: First team to top of tower wins





» The *JSWO* team and assorted sprites take time out from their busy coding to pose for Retro Gamer.

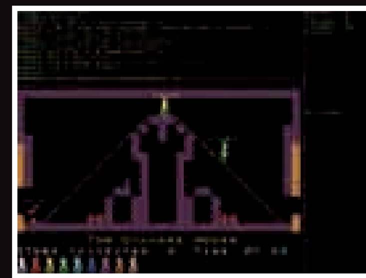


» Two characters caught in an infinate death loop.

let's face it, the idea of seeing someone doing that infinite death routine from a screen above was something that we all needed to see."

Of course, the other problem with tampering with something as beloved as *Jet Set Willy* is how the manic (I thank you) fan base will react. After all, turning something as sacred as *Jet Set Willy* into an MMO is tantamount to travelling over to India and slapping a bejewelled white cow around the face in front of a group of astonished onlookers. Not being a worrier, or a Hindu for that matter, Watson wasn't concerned in the slightest. "We didn't really have any issues as, unlike most of these MMORPG's, this wasn't being made to coin it in. This was being made for pure fun by people who love retro games so it was never going to be a sloppy half-arsed effort." Retro Gamer would like readers to note that we have no idea what he's on about. "We had always hoped it was going to be well received by *JSW* fans. There is a hardcore *JSW* element that will be disappointed, people that think that *JSW* is somehow only their domain and any modification is sacrilege. We had to make slight engine changes to make the game workable for multiplayer but it only adds to the fun, which is all that matters in my book. The important thing is it works in multiplayer while still very much retaining the very essence and fun factor that made *JSW* great."

Undoubtedly, not wanting to immediately infuriate die-hard fans, *JSWO* starts off in the original Bathroom but after some brief exploration it soon becomes obvious that Willy's mansion has had a visit from the *House Invaders* team since you last visited it. He's been living in that house for 22 years now so you can't blame the bloke for wanting to smarten it up a bit. Watson was more than keen to tell us how they went about extending the already considerable 134 rooms that made up Willy's mansion in the original sequel. "We used an editor created by Stu in order to create our levels. A nice clean point-and-click interface," he states, before revealing that there are plenty of tributes within the huge mansion. Providing, of course, that you know where to look… "There is a room called Magic which has a huge Magic Knight head and also a recreation of the room Odd Ball from *Spellbound* as well as a giant Monty Mole and Nomen Luni," he eagerly lets slip. "There are also rooms named after and inspired by several Retro-Remakes regulars. For example, I created 'Geekay's Pr0n stash' as a friendly poke at Geekay from Retro-Remakes. Several others – some in good taste, some not – include 'Ace of Spades' (A giant ace of spades card based on the Motorhead song), 'Tom Cruise's House' (Inside the Closet with an, er, interesting sculpture, 'Jeremy Beadle's Hand' (I said they weren't all in good taste) 'Lance's Bumming Parlour'… there's an interesting story behind that one, and 'Telly Twats Hill' because not everyone liked the Tellytubbies." Fearon continues the tale: "There's a whole section of the game based around a trip into Jeff Minter's head, for example (we all know how much he adores *Jet Set Willy*, right?), while another section is based on the song titles of Luke Haines," he reveals. "If I had to pick my two best references though, one would be to a certain famed Scientologist, while the other is a phrase once uttered by Chris Morris to Cliff Richard. Some of the references are definitely more loving than others, I'd never slate Yak in a game, for example, as he's still one of the few coders out there who continues to blow my mind with his work and is a major inspiration on what I do. Although, I will freely admit that some of the other folks mentioned in the game perhaps don't come off so well… Perhaps we should offer a prize at some point for whoever manages to work out where everything comes from?



» Yes that really is what you think it is.

With four dangerously fertile minds hard at work creating bizarre new designs – in total there are 125 new rooms added to the main map, with just under another 200 created for the various mini-games – we were more than a little curious to know why so many extra locations had been added. "I've no idea why we ended up including so many rooms," admits a self-bemused Storey, "we just kept going and going. We started off with the original *JSW2* rooms, then we added about 25 extra each, then a new mini-game, more

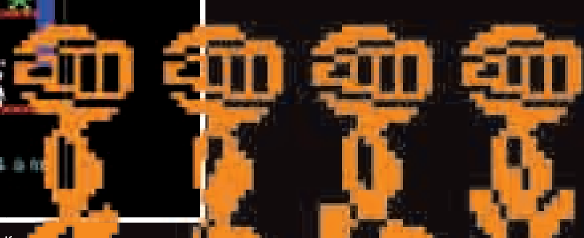


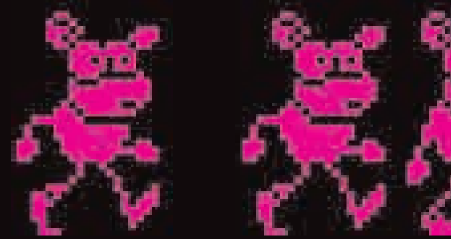


» You can download *JSWO* from http://jsw.ovine.net/



» It looks amazingly messy, but you won't know how great this actually is until you try it for yourself.





"IT'S MATT SMITH'S BABY. WE ALL WANTED TO CREATE SOMETHING THAT STICKS CLOSE TO THE ORIGINAL BUT WITH MORE WILLYS" TREVOR STOREY





» A small example of Collier's coding for *JSWO*. If you take every sixth word it foretells the coming of the apocalypse.

new rooms, more new mini-games until we finally had to stop. When another game mode idea came to mind we'd start up again. In fact, we could have easily kept going for the rest of the year until we had a file that was a few gig in size."

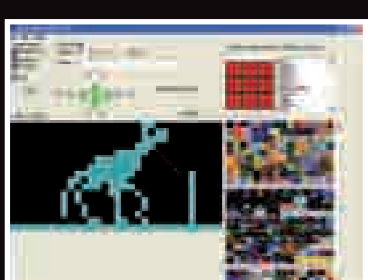
Luckily, the boys saw sense and despite their love of celebrity Scientologists and bumming parlours (we're certainly not suggesting these are linked in any way) they finally drew a line when they hit the magic number 450. Now that they had a huge playground to explore, the next objective, if you pardon the expression, was to fill it with Willys. While most MMOs feature a near limitless amount of players, it was decided that the numbers in *JSWO* would be far more sensible. Judging by this interview, the concept of what's 'sensible' is highly subjective. "Well, at the moment we've set *JSWO* up so that a maximum of 16 players can take part at any one time," explains Storey. "There is the possibility that we could add more if we felt the need to, but I don't know. Could you imagine 50 Willys all on the same screen at once? Oooh matron!" I've seen a website like that.

Of course, watching a screen of assorted Willys running around and going about their own sordid business may seem like the stuff that Matthew Smith's dreams are made of, but it does tend to make it a little hard to work out who's who, even with each person's name above their head. To counter this, a variety of different sprites have been included – some familiar, some not so. While it's a pleasing addition, surely the most super-awesome thing in the world would be to upload your very own Willy. Imagine the sort of twisted creations that would be running around then… "We were originally going to have uploadable Willy characters but decided on having lots to chose from instead," says Storey. "A few people have mailed us asking if they can send in the odd Willy and we have put them in the game. If we do a big update in the future I am sure we'll let people make their own Willys for insertion; we'll just have to wait and see."

Regardless of what you think of *Jet Set Willy Online*, there's no denying that the fantastic foursome (we couldn't say four due to copyright reasons) has done an amazing job at not only capturing the spirit of the original game, but also ensuring that there's enough new content to keep veterans happy.

But what of Willy's creator? Has he had a chance to sample this online delight? "We really hope he has and we hope he likes it," begins Storey, suggesting that there's every chance Matthew Smith is completely unaware of the existence of this masterpiece painted with his 22-year-old brush. "Ultimately, it's his baby and we all wanted to create something that sticks close to the original but with more Willys, and I'm sure Matt has nothing against more Willys. If you still read Retro Gamer, Matt, I'm sure you'd delight the masses if you made a race map and had us put it in the game. Of course, it would be fantastic to get Matt's blessing, same for Mr Wetherill and Mr Rowson who did the extra rooms for *JSWII* as without their hard work in the first place, the game wouldn't even exist. Perhaps Retro Gamer can pull a few strings to get all three together for a multiplayer session? That would be awesome."

We'll certainly try and pull a few Willys. Who knows how many retro celebrities might come together if we do?



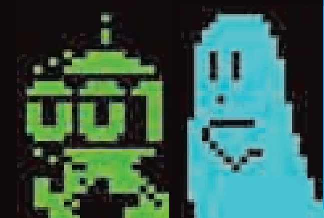
» A behind the scenes glimpse of *JSWO*.

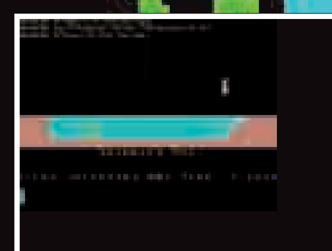
AND FOR MY NEXT TRICK…

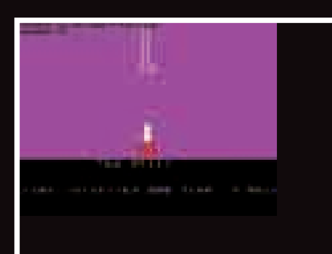
So now that the awesome *Jet Set Willy Online* is finally up and running we were more than a little interested to know what the boys had next on their busy schedules.

It would appear that Storey and Watson have created a time machine, either that, or they've found a way to duplicate themselves. The busy beavers are currently working on a variety of projects including a remake of Dan Dare and a new version of the Megatree (which was never completed), while Storey is also working on remakes of Exile II and Wizball (with Retro Remakes regular Dr Derek Doctors).

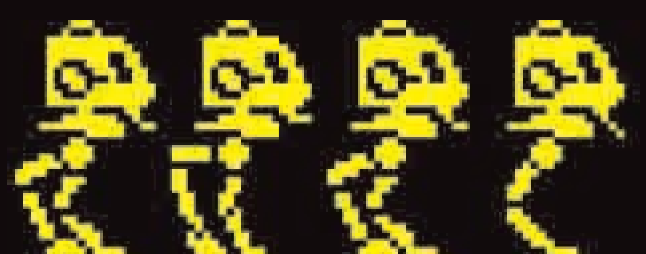








» The early Photoshop images that Fearon created for Way Of The Rodent.





DEVELOPER LOOKBACK



FROM THE ASHES

THE NINETIES WAS A GREAT PERIOD FOR BEAM SOFTWARE. WITH MELBOURNE HOUSE HAVING BEEN SOLD TO VIRGIN, BEAM GOT DOWN TO BUSINESS, KNOCKING OUT CLASSIC GAMES, PRIMARILY FOR CONSOLES. DAVID CROOKES CONCLUDES OUR TWO-PART LOOK AT THIS FAMOUS DEVELOPER.

IN BRIEF

Beam Software reverse engineers the NES and its programmers write games for the console. Impressed, Nintendo hands Beam a developers licence. Beam boss Alfred Milgrom decides consoles are the future – even embracing the PowerGlove. Movie tie-ins and a host of original titles follow. Beam continues to leak cash and by the late-Nineties, Milgrom – having re-acquired the name Melbourne House – sells again, this time to Infogrames. A few changes later – including a takeover by Atari – and the firm becomes Krome Studios Melbourne.

THE Eighties had been good for publisher Melbourne House. It had enjoyed its golden age, becoming drunk on the success of such fabled games as *The Hobbit*, *Lord Of The Rings* and *Way Of The Exploding Fist*. And in the minds of gamers, it had also cemented itself as one of the few brands you could really trust. Although Melbourne House and its developer subsidiary, Beam Software, were not as prolific as many of their rivals, their 'quality over quantity' mantra was appreciated by videogamers across the world.

Sales of Melbourne House's games had not so much rocketed as gone to the moon and continued to travel. With great reviews in the major computer magazines at the time, too, Melbourne and Beam could hardly put a foot wrong – in terms of producing games, that is. Financially, Melbourne House/Beam struggled in the late-Eighties which is why the UK publishing arm and name were snapped up by budget house Mastertronic. A series of takeovers and mergers saw the firm become the Mastertronic Group, then Virgin Mastertronic, then Virgin Interactive Entertainment. What was becoming apparent through this series of changes however, was that the Melbourne House name was being forgotten.

Fortunately, Beam Software, which did not form any part of these deals, was given the opportunity to thrive and as the company entered the Nineties, it continued to knock out some brilliant videogames. If the Eighties was Melbourne House's golden period – a time when the Commodore 64 and Spectrum owners would salivate at the mere mention of a forthcoming game from this Australian powerhouse – then the Nineties would prove to be the platinum era when the latest technologies were being pushed… sometimes to the limit.

It was a time of innovation and growth and boss Fred Milgrom was keen to look to the future. His programmers were too. "The halcyon days of Commodore 64 and Spectrum development



were over," says game designer Ian Malcolm. "We had to move on." Malcolm joined Beam in late-1989 just as it was working on games for the NES. Experts at Beam had been reverse engineering the console and were just beginning to create games for it. In particular, Beam was working on *Street Hassle* and Nintendo was so impressed it handed Beam a developer licence.

The company thus became only the second non-Japanese firm to develop games for the console and it was a defining moment for Beam, allowing it to continue to be at the forefront of games production. "Fred thought the NES was the next big thing," recalls programmer Andrew Davie. "Our reverse engineering team had been working on the NES and they were using a game I was writing at the time, *Street Hassle*, as a sort of template for their tests. They had created their own version which looked like a sort of *Street Hassle* but was really just a hodgepodge hardwired testing environment. Anyway, when I finished *Street Hassle*, Fred said that he wanted me to do our first NES game. I was delighted. He told me: 'Take the version that the reverse-engineering team has been programming and finish it up. You have two weeks.'

I was appalled. The testbed was not suitable for conversion to a working program – it needed re-writing from scratch, though I wasn't given that opportunity. What's more, the prototype programming manuals which the engineers had created instructing us on how to program the NES were very basic. They had a few hints and tips on how to program the machine, but it was also full of 'don't know what this does.' I think, on and off, I was nine months into that project before it was put to bed. It was a miserable, miserable time in my career."

Yet the excitement of being a Nintendo developer caused Beam to grab any opportunity it could in relation to the NES. Among the decisions it made was to work with the PowerGlove, the ill-fated peripheral produced by Mattel in America and PAX in Japan. Released in 1989, this controller accessory for the NES was officially licensed by Nintendo. It recreated human hand movements on screen and, as well as having a D-pad on the forearm, it had a program button. This was used to program the numbered buttons – labelled 0 to 9 – into performing various functions.

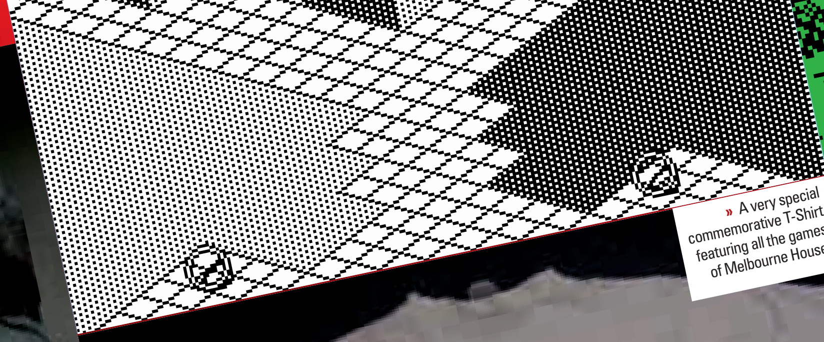
Davie remembers: "Adam [Lancman, shareholder and joint managing director of Beam Group] called me to his office. He told me he had good news. Beam had sold *Bad Street Brawler* and it was going to be the first PowerGlove game. The deal was that Mattel had a new prototype device, the PowerGlove, and they wanted a cheap game into which they could piggyback 'codes' for existing games. The idea was you would insert *BSB*, download the PowerGlove code for the game you wanted to play, and then put in the game you wanted to play and use PowerGlove gestures. Yet when I first saw the device, it was a golf glove with wires and a silver box, very home-brew looking and unfortunately, when BSB finally made it out of the door, it was to 'worst ten NES games of all time' type reviews. And rightly so – it's probably the one program I've been involved with that I'd totally disown."

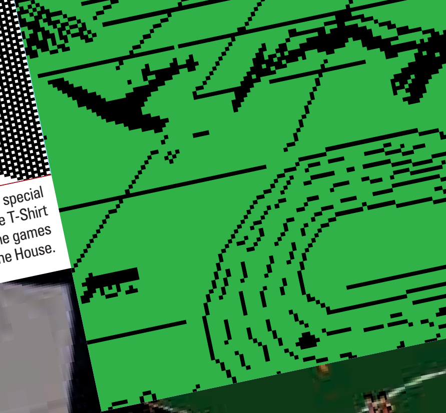
Still, attentions were turning to consoles in a big way. Starting with the NES, the company later branched into making games for the Game Boy and SNES. The 8-bit computers, the Spectrums and Commodore 64s, were becoming a distant memory. "The move to the NES brought in a new way of working," says Malcolm. "A 'licensed tie-in' mentality began to develop but there were a number

FROM COMPUTERS TO CONSOLES

If the Eighties was the decade of the home computers, the Nineties was the era of the console, at least for Melbourne House/Beam. But how difficult was it to switch from home computers to consoles by Nintendo and Sega? Programmer Graeme Scott says: "It wasn't that hard. The biggest difference was in the type of media and the memory really – the NES had 2KB of memory while the SNES had 128KB. I would say the biggest change has been with the move to later consoles and the introduction of the 3D age. The 32-bit consoles had 2MB of memory and that helped immeasurably in enabling us to bring bigger and better games. These later consoles also brought an end to writing in assembly, at least for the entire project. By writing in C as we came to do, we were able to focus more on the game and less on the writing of the code. […] It's far easier to write in a high-level language such as C/C++; it lets you get the job done without having to worry about the low-level details of the machine."

"BEAM SOFTWARE BECAME ONLY THE SECOND NON-JAPANESE FIRM TO DEVELOP GAMES FOR THE NES – IT WAS A DEFINING MOMENT"







» A very special commemorative T-Shirt featuring all the games of Melbourne House.



» *Mission Impossible* was one of Melbourne House's later games, appearing in 2003.





» A selection of games and machines that featured in the recent Melbourne House Exhibition, which, conveniently, was held at Melbourne, Australia.



of staff still there who'd retained an 'anything goes' mindset. I was fortunate enough to be able to gravitate toward that. My first project there, before I later became a designer, was as a storyboard artist on *Nightshade* for the NES, working primarily with lead designer Paul Kidd. He was not only very welcoming to a newbie but also the most fun person I've ever worked with, not to mention barking mad – in a good way."

Nightshade was a graphic adventure about a fledgling superhero setting out to free Metro City from the hands of evil Egyptian villain Sutekh. Told with hyperbolic narration, the game has slipped into relative obscurity since but this enjoyable curiosity, published by Ultra, showed Beam Software's ambition for the NES. The game wasn't released until 1992. Two other games Malcolm had worked on – *Back To The Future II/III* (1990) and *Star Wars* (1991) – came out first. It seems the film licences were taking precedence.

"The company was gradually moving toward a more professional set-up," says Malcolm. "Fred used to wear kaftans, proof of which I discovered in some old photos that turned up when we shifted offices. But he ditched them for the rather more imposing and businesslike black suit and bow tie. Development wise, we were very much locked into the NES, primarily creating games for the US market rather than Australia or Europe. Yet while Beam was moving toward the slicker entity that it ultimately became, there was still evidence of the more casual beginnings to be found. Most of the desks were actually old wooden doors painted black and balanced on trestles and I had to share a PC with someone else for my first two or three months. The place felt like a rabbit warren built from a motley collection of mismatched partitions, there was almost always a loud mix tape playing in the art/design area where I lived at the time, and despite management efforts to rein them in, some people still seemed to work very odd hours."

Although the market was noticeably shifting toward the United States, and the movie game tie-in continued to gain popularity (*The Hunt For Red October* was released in 1991), Beam Software still had a little bit of time to dedicate to those videogames that appealed to its home market. *Aussie Rules Footy* was released in 1991, for instance.

But still the big projects prevailed. "*Star Wars* was an interesting case," recalls Malcolm. "I remember being at a loose end one afternoon so I burned myself some ROMs of the current build of *Star Wars*, just to take a look at it, since I was interested but knew very little about it. There were some fairly obvious things I thought could possibly be improved, and I compiled a list of them. The next morning, I wound up talking to a couple of people about some of the issues. What I didn't know was that Fred had come in late that day, and was standing out of view behind me the whole time I was talking. I may have been a bit tactless in some of my comments, too, so when I finished I almost jumped out of my seat when his voice behind me said, 'Alright then, why don't you fix it?' Oops.

Part of the problem with *Star Wars*, at that point was that the project was effectively being worked on simultaneously in three different countries . Programming, level design and some graphics were being done in Melbourne; all the graphics for the top-down sections (the landspeeder desert stuff and Death Star attack) were being done by Lucasfilm Games – as they were then known – in California; and the three-dimensional first-person flight sections were being done by a Melbourne House person who was, at that point living in London."

Malcolm rebuilt most of the existing levels from scratch and created further ones, then the team spent weeks altering jump heights, movement rates, air and surface friction and weapons firing rates to give the main controllable characters a distinctly different feel from one another. Lucasfilm then sent over several of its staff to help finish the game. "It wound up becoming something that I still think holds up quite well in comparison with its peers of the day," Malcolm says.

TESTING TIMES

To ensure Beam Software's games were of the best possible standard, they had to go through quality assurance. Ann Davie was a software tester for Beam, later becoming Q&A manager and then a producer. She joined in 1990, although she had worked with the firm when she was at American software publisher Mindscape. "There wasn't really a team of testers when I started, or anyone specifically dedicated to testing," she says. "Testing was mainly done by junior programmers and artists who were available to carry out testing as required. As Beam grew and the number of titles increased, the need for a dedicated group of testers became apparent. We were programming Nintendo titles and Nintendo's quality requirements were quite strict. There was no margin for error and we had to demonstrate that the games would work on all the various chips that had been produced. My team consisted of around four dedicated testers and around three or four other staff – programmers and artists – who would help out. We would videotape the gameplay, note tape positions of problems, produce reports with those references and pass them along to the producer, programmer or artist involved. It ensured our products would be of the highest standard possible."





» Darren Bremner: "*The Hunt For Red October* was a bit of a shock. It was my second day in work and I was told I had three to four weeks to complete a platform game section."





» *Looney Tunes Space Race* was a flawed gem that had taken the vast majority of its development time to reach a point where it even remotely felt like a game, and then surprised its developers by actually turning out to be quite a good one.







» Infogrames' takeover of Melbourne House marked the beginning of the end for Fred Milgrom's involvement.



» As time went on, Fred Milgrom and Melbourne House/Beam became more professional.

Marshall Parker, Beam's audio director and music composer, produced the soundtrack for the *Star Wars* game. "To be working with Lucasfilm was exciting, and trying to adapt John Williams' score to the NES was indeed a challenge," he admits. "I remember writing an adaptation of John Williams' Cantina music and mixing it with some original music of my own. The Lucasfilm producer told me it was the best piece of music he'd ever heard on an NES. I was very proud about that."

Marshall started at Beam part-time, working three afternoons each week and whipping up tunes using a word processor. He worked on a huge number of games, among them *Star Wars*, *T2*, *Nightshade*, *Shadowrun*, *Blades Of Vengeance*, *True Lies*, *Radical Rex*, *Itchy And Scratchy*, *Choplifter II*, *Bug*, and *Norse By Norse West*.

"At the time, I never realised that these would become landmark titles," adds Malcolm. "I look back now with fondness, realising that this was only the beginning of an industry that would explode into what it is today. Back then I was a freelance record producer, jingle writer and live musician. Making sounds and music for games on primitive equipment was just a bit of fun on the side."

The international relations being fostered by Beam Software was helping the company to produce bigger and better games and creativity continued to be encouraged. There were around 38 staff working on a whole multitude of projects with people doing something new, interesting or exciting at every turn. Yet most of it was for overseas markets and so Australians were hardly aware of what was going on.

"The game was king. Not schedules, not budgets, not timetables, not marketers, the game," says Darren Bremner, who joined Beam Software as a programmer in 1990. "We wrote them, played them and polished them, to hopefully produce something we could be proud of." Darren's first game was the movie tie-in that was *The Hunt For Red October*, for the NES. "Toward the end of the project, the publishers wanted an extra game added to the end of the side scroller shoot-'em-up sub-game," explains Bremner. "So it was my job to add a platform game section where you battled your way through the sub and disarmed bombs.

Bremner then went on to work on some of Beam Software's best early-Nineties games. He was lead programmer on *Shadowrun* and despite his background being a development manager for a business software house, his enthusiasm and love of computer games unleashed his creative side. That background did cause a few problems though. "When I started at Beam," he begins, "I was given a desk, a computer, a NES development kit and manuals and I was told to play around on the NES for a couple of weeks and get the hang of it. I started with a simple game, *Pac-Man*, and I started to put it on the NES, drawing the artwork to learn the art tools. It was a good day. But then, after work, there were some drinks around one of the programmers flats. They asked me where I came from, how much I'd earned doing business software, so I told them. They were then very interested in what I was earning at Beam and I said I'd taken a substantial pay cut to work in games.

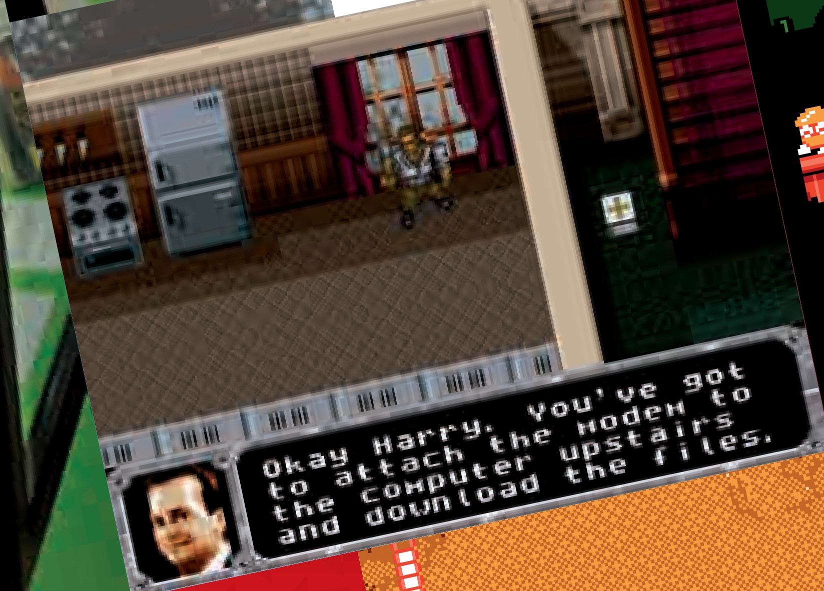
I was sure my salary was way less than theirs,' continues Bremner. "They were senior experienced programmers who had been writing games for years. During the interview I'd asked about

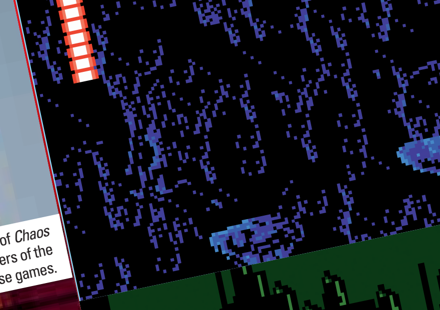
"ALTHOUGH THE MARKET WAS SHIFTING TOWARD THE US, BEAM STILL HAD TIME FOR ITS HOME MARKET WITH AUSSIE RULES FOOTY"

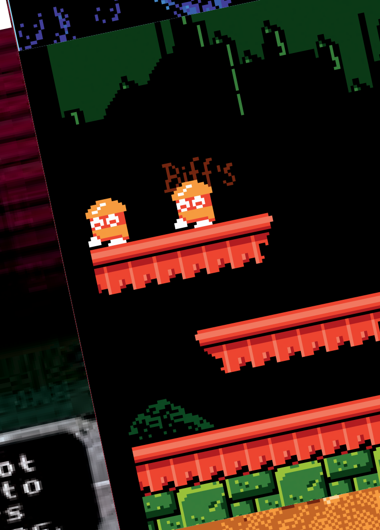




» Some of the team working on *True Lies* were fans of *Chaos Engine*, *Alien Breed* and various other top-down shooters of the time, so decided to use elements of those games.









salaries and had been given example salaries for each level, so after a while I told the programmers what I was being paid. It was more than any of them. The pay figures I was given were bogus." Nevertheless, Bremner got stuck in and became an accepted member of the Beam dream team, later spending 100 to 120 hours each week for 14 months working on *Shadowrun* for the SNES.

Bremner laughs: "I had to work really hard since the game's production didn't start until almost a year after Beam had told the publisher it was underway. We were given one or two useless pages of design and then we all began to evolve it. For six months, we worked until we were all too tired to work, went home, slept, got up and came to work again. We ate all of our meals – bar breakfast – at work in this weird, no-weekend life. And because of how we were working, days became 26 to 28 hours long. We'd sometimes be coming in at 5pm as others were leaving and going home the next day as they went to lunch. Management just left us to it. We were doing the work as quickly and as well as we could."

Shadowrun was a dark game, a departure from the usual 'light' offerings of other Nintendo titles. The player assumed the role of courier Jake Armitage who is almost killed by a gunman in Seattle in 2050. He wakes up, with amnesia, in a morgue and so begins the classic action role-playing game which is more of a PC title than one for the console market. By killing enemies or beating bosses, Jake built up karma which gave him different attributes, skills and magical powers and it all combined to produce a critically acclaimed game.

Titles such as *Shadowrun* were being created alongside big hitters such as *True Lies*, a licence of the movie which starred Arnold Schwarzenegger. The pressures of having to get a licence just right, however, meant more resources were often ploughed into them. With *True Lies*, Milgrom and Lancman splashed out, approaching the title rather differently from their other games. The key team members were sent to stay in a luxury hotel for two days to allow them to 'thrash out the basics of the game' without any senior management influence.

Rather than make *True Lies* another side-scrolling run-and-gun type platformer, the team decided to mix elements of *Chaos Engine*, *Alien Breed* and various other top-down shooters of the time and then add their own additional features into the mix. Beam's management loved the result and it was delivered pretty much on time. And, hey, it played well too.

More frivolous games like *Radical Rex* were then produced: "I still have mental scars from that game," reveals Malcolm. "Rex is a dinosaur. Who breathes fire. And rides a skateboard [Sighs]." Sequels to earlier titles were also knocked out.

Programmer Graeme Scott says: "I was proud to work on *Choplifter III* which came out in 1994. It was the first game where I was the lead programmer, and working on a game that I used to play to death as a kid on the Commodore 64 was a real thrill."

In 1996, Beam Software became the first publicly listed videogames company on the Australian Stock Exchange. At the time, Beam's directors had also realised that the Melbourne House brand had been allowed to lapse by Virgin so they re-registered it and launched it as its publishing/game development subsidiary.

A few sporting titles – the likes of *Cricket 96* and *NBA Full Court Press* – were produced for the PC, and then the developer began to work on the *Krush Kill 'N' Destroy* games. Justin Halliday, a producer at Melbourne House, worked on *KKND: Infiltrator*. "It is best described as an action driving game, with the player taking the role of a dirt bike scout who must undertake a series of dangerous missions," concludes Halliday. "It was relatively successful in the crowded real-time strategy market."

Such success could not turn around Beam Software's debt, however, and by 1999 the company was $12 million in the red. Alfred Milgrom and Adam Lancman were looking for a buyer for

BRAINSTORMING

Not all of the ideas conjured up at Beam Software made the cut. Game ideas were left to the programmers, and people like Paul Kidd spent years writing game designs which were promptly filed away and forgotten.

Sometimes programmers would get to see a preview screening or a script of a movie before release, then go and brainstorm a game from that. The design sessions involved the programmers, possibly Fred Milgrom, the artists and whoever happened to be around. "I remember the sessions for the people and the occasional zany moments, not for the company itself," says Andrew Davie, "and probably the freedom that we all had contributed to it, but I think it was just that period where it was possible for the bedroom programmer to actually make something that would succeed on the world market. They were exciting times."





» *Shadowrun* programmer Darren Bremner went on to produce the acclaimed *Transformers*, creating a lot of the eye candy, grass, snow, snow drifts, trees, parts of the ocean. "It turned into a very nice looking game."



» *KKND* and *KKND2: Krossfire* were popular but sequel *KKND: Infiltrator* was later canned.



» Now THAT'S how you play *Way of the Exploding Fist*.



» The impressive Platinum Cassette Award that was presented to Alfred Milgrom.

Melbourne House – and that's when Infogrames stepped forward. The French videogame publisher was brimming over with spare cash from the success of *V-Rally* on the PlayStation and found itself looking for more acquisitions, having already snapped up Manchester-based Ocean Software which had published some of Beam's games in the Nineties, a few years earlier.

Halliday recalls: "Around this time the company was close to its peak staffing, of about 120 people, and there were three teams working on separate titles, *KKND: Infiltrator*, *Biotech*, and *Dethkarz 2*. Additionally, there were a number of other areas being worked on, like the Smarty Pants educational titles, Famous facial motion capture, and the Hotgames website. But after being publicly listed a few years earlier, it was fairly clear that the games we released weren't huge hits. The staff were spread across too many projects, and the company was struggling. There was a lot of uncertainty. We went from having three projects running to having them all cancelled, but with nothing concrete to replace them.

Infiltrator was cancelled and became *Mad Max*. Then *Biotech* was re-imagined before being cancelled. *Dethkarz 2* was also canned. Personally, the chance to work on *Mad Max* was much more interesting than *Infiltrator*, and *Biotech* had been in development for a while so its cancellation wasn't unwarranted. But the uncertainty continued until we got working on *Le Mans* and *Looney Tunes: Space Race*, for the Dreamcast."

In 2001, Milgrom left Melbourne House and formed Blaze, taking with him the non-game technologies Smarty Pants, Famous and Hotgames. He continues to run Smarty Pants to this day. This left Adam Lancman as the chief executive officer of Infogrames Melbourne House, the new name for the company, but he too left shortly afterwards.

"It was almost business as usual," remembers Halliday. "But we did have a number of visits, one from boss Bruno Bonnell, and another from a finance guy. The finance guy was a renowned toe-cutter, who told us that Infogrames was looking for new ways to sell games, including possibly through shoe shops."

Over the last few years, there have been more changes. Infogrames adopted the Atari brand in 2003 and Infogrames Melbourne House became Atari Melbourne House. Then, last year, Atari boss Bruno Bonnell declared that Atari Melbourne House was up for sale. In the November, Krome Studios made the announcement that it had acquired the firm – hence it now being known as Krome Studios Melbourne.

"It's an amazing time for us right now and we couldn't be happier to welcome this new team to the Krome family," says Robert Walsh, chief executive officer and co-founder of Krome Studios. "Acquiring the Melbourne House studio will allow us to continue to expand our company with additional seasoned talent to help further grow our business and position ourselves as a leading developer working on both current and next-generation titles."

While that brings us up to date, Melbourne House in its current guise now looks set to write the next chapter of a book which is already brimming with memories and great games.

"To some degree, there was a pioneering spirit at Melbourne House," concludes Ian Malcolm. "There were a lot of people with a real passion to create, to make something really worthwhile – games that they wanted to play for themselves and also share with others. But like so many companies, it was the people that could make it both the best – and worst – place to be. And I think the legacy was a host of great games."

Special thanks to Thuyen Nguyen, and also Gabriel McGrath who supplied us with several images from his recent visit to the Melbourne House Exhibition.

"BEAM WAS THE FIRST PUBLICLY LISTED GAMES COMPANY LISTED ON THE AUSTRALIAN STOCK EXCHANGE"

FRIDAY THE 13TH

HE'S BEHIND YOU KEV!



- » **PUBLISHER:** DOMARK
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **RELEASED:** 1986
- » **GENRE:** ADVENTURE
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ZX SPECTRUM
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** SAVE YOUR PENNIES



HISTORY

It's a well-known fact that most videogame movie licences aren't worth the tape/disc/whatever they're printed on. Granted, you'll find the occasional game that successfully manages to capture the atmosphere of its bigger peer, but it's hardly a common occurrence. Just take a look at *Friday The 13th*.

Thanks to some superb artwork on the front of Crash by Oliver Frey, and Domark's suitably bloody marketing campaign, interest in *Friday* was initially quite high. Then the game itself turned up and Spectrum fans soon knew what real horror really was.

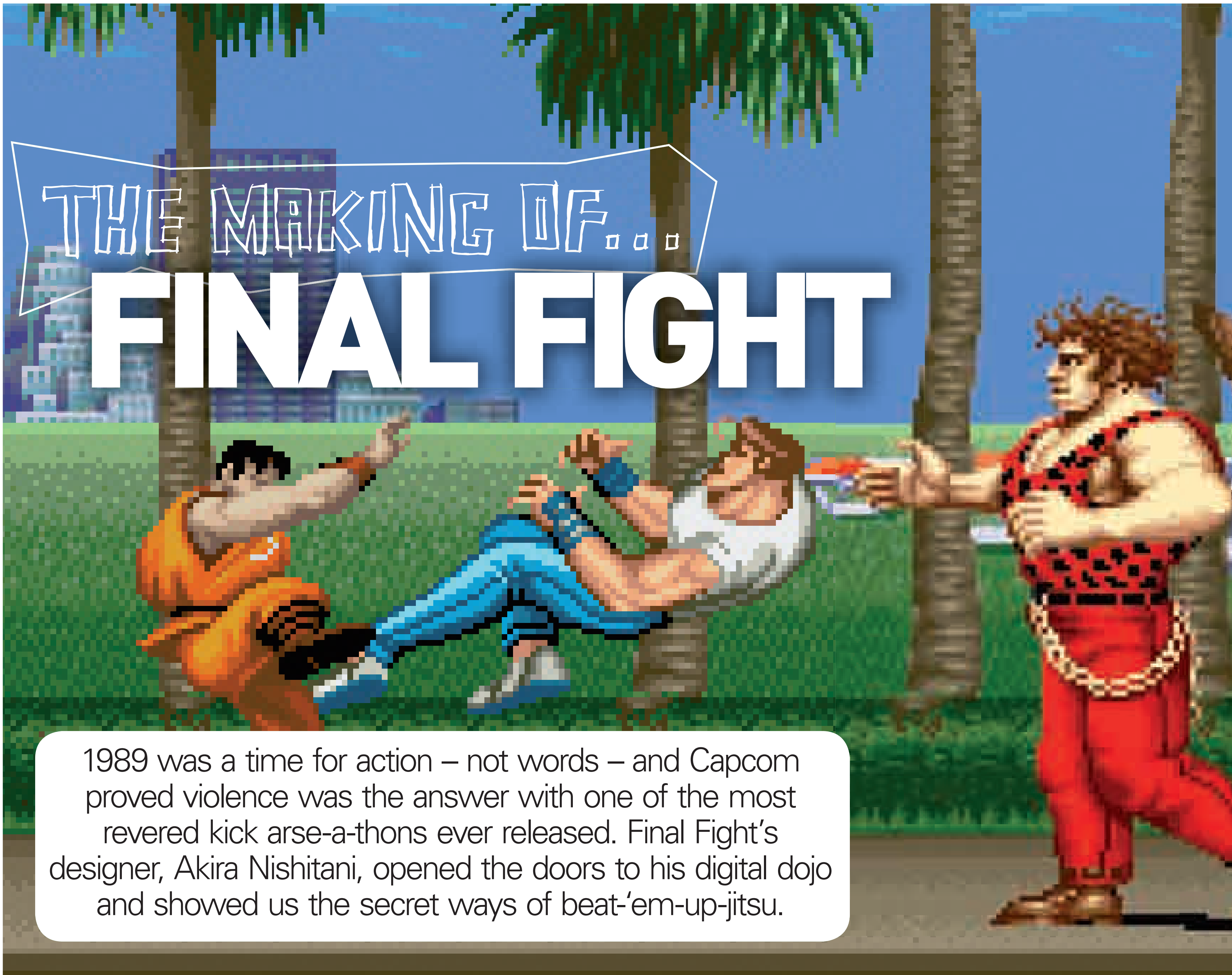
Domark had created an atrocity of a game that's only redeeming feature was some fake blood capsules that were packaged with it. Taking control of a sprite that looked like it had been knocked together in a few minutes by a blindfolded art student, your task was to shuffle around bland locations and convince other nastily animated characters to follow you to a safe haven, whilst avoiding a psychotic Jason.

Look, let's just stop there. The game is bloody rubbish and we've now regretted the amount of effort and time it's taken to put together the image on the right, so let's just talk about the movie instead.

For starters never use *Friday The 13th* when playing 'Six Degrees Of Kevin Bacon' because hardly any of the cast had significant acting careers, and while it's possible to jump to Eddie Murphy by using Walt Gorney in just one move you may as well use Robert De Niro instead. Unless of course you just want to be a smartass movie buff and show off. If you're looking for *Friday The 13th* inspired entertainment, forget about Domark's insipid title and just try doing the following. Close your eyes and think back to that magical moment where our Kev gets stabbed through the neck with an arrow and receives a messy, gurgling death. Captured that image? Good. Now just replay it over and over and over and over again. Now "that's entertainment" as The Jam would say.




Oh dear...
You seem to have lost
HA..HA..HA
Press ENTER to pla



THE MAKING OF…
FINAL FIGHT

1989 was a time for action – not words – and Capcom proved violence was the answer with one of the most revered kick arse-a-thons ever released. Final Fight's designer, Akira Nishitani, opened the doors to his digital dojo and showed us the secret ways of beat-'em-up-jitsu.

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
» **DEVELOPER:** CAPCOM
» **RELEASED:** 1989
» **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** 50+ PCB BOARD

It wasn't the first 2D, scrolling, two-player co-operative fighting game, and it certainly wasn't the last. Viewed from afar with a slightly cynical tilt of an indifferent head, it wouldn't take much to brand *Final Fight* with the same iron as all the other beat-'em-ups from the arcade's silver age. But through a careful and considered analysis of this intricate genre, Capcom brilliantly distilled the art of the beat-'em-up to create the most refined example ever seen.

We put on our sparring gloves and talked to the co-designer and programmer of *Final Fight*, the high-spirited and enigmatic Akira Nishitani.

THE SUPER GREY PLAYER

"I was born in Tokyo, and as long as I can remember, I always loved to play games: board games, card games – I liked to play any kind of game!" Nishitani begins. "While I was a high school student I got a part time job as writer for Beep! magazine, mainly concentrating on arcade games. After I graduated from high school, I started to work as a planner. This job has become very important in Japanese game design, but back then it was still quite unusual."

A passion for games and an organic progression toward the arcade is a similar story to that of many accomplished designers we know today. And clearly this passion has not waned. He continues:

"These days I play games more as work than as a hobby, but I still play everyday. I think it's very important to someone involved in the industry, although I secretly aspire to be a 'super grey player'! I'm determined to be better than all those young players!" he laughs, striking an accord with retro gamers the world over with his wonderfully esoteric Japanese phrase, "super grey player" (this is a literal translation which is simply too delicious to wilfully alter, but is perhaps best interpreted as "mature, yet respected, gamer").



» Akira Nishitani motivates his troops at Arika – the game developer he established after leaving Capcom.

When *Final Fight* was being conceived, it was a time of change for the entire videogame industry, and Capcom played no small part in ushering in that new age. Akira told us a little about those embryonic days at one of the most historically significant videogame developers.

"[Capcom] was an incredibly lively place, although there weren't actually that many employees when I first started work there. It was great, because everyone felt like we had the opportunity to create our own future.

"At that time, these kinds of action and



» Haggar attempts to persuade Belger, head of the Mad Gear Gang, to stop bothering his daughter.

» The arcade flyer depicting the short lived *Street Fighter '89* concept.

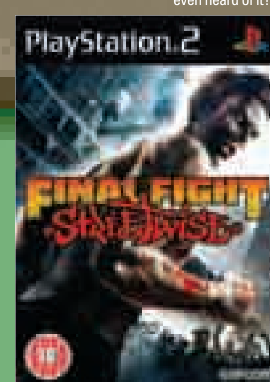
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

X-MEN: CHILDREN OF THE ATOM
SYSTEMS: ARCADE
YEAR: 1994

FORGOTTEN WORLDS
SYSTEMS: ARCADE
YEAR: 1988

STREET FIGHTER II: THE WORLD WARRIOR
SYSTEMS: ARCADE
YEAR: 1991

» What does it say about a modern day sequel when the creator of the original has never even heard of it?



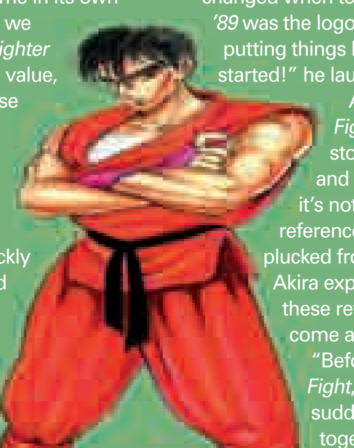
fighting games had only just become popular, so we decided it was the right time to make our own. They had been around for a long time of course, but to be frank, I don't think these kinds of game were ever much fun for me. I looked at the style of fighting games, and thought to myself "how can I make it more interesting?" That was the beginning." he says with genuine, patriarchal emotion.

STREET FIGHTER '89

A cursory jaunt around the internet reveals what is probably the most spoken about and historically important aspect of *Final Fight*'s conception: its *Street Fighter* lineage. But that family tree may not be as well rooted as it's been suggested.

It occasionally escapes our notice that the original *Street Fighter* shared little in common with its legendary offspring. *Street Fighter* had gained considerable recognition, but even by 1989 it had been severely tamed by time. There is evidence that suggests *Final Fight* was originally intended to be a sequel to the somewhat damp *Street Fighter* squib, but the monumental differences in gameplay and design somewhat belie that tenuous inheritance. Nishitani-san explained further.

"Our intention was to develop *Final Fight* as an original game in its own right – and that's what we did. However, *Street Fighter* had such a high name value, we decided to make use of its recognition and changed the name to *Street Fighter '89* for a game show where it was first displayed," explains Nishitani, quickly unravelling the knotted rope of *Final Fight*'s origin. He continues.



"At the game show, it received an excellent reception, proving even more popular than we could have hoped. But this really wasn't related to *Street Fighter*. We'd made *Final Fight* as we'd intended – with a totally different and new world view, so once its popularity had been confirmed, we decided to go back to the original name.

"If truth be told, the only thing we ever changed when testing it as *Street Fighter '89* was the logo, so it was no hardship putting things back to how they started!" he laughs.

Although the *Street Fighter* inspiration may stop at a rather abrupt and unchallenged brick wall, it's not the only pop-culture reference ardent fans have plucked from *Final Fight*'s ether. Akira explained how some of these references might have come about.

"Before we developed *Final Fight*, Capcom's president suddenly gathered us all together and said, "The

RELATED GAMES AND SPIN-OFFS

ALSO IN THE SERIES
FINAL FIGHT GUY
MIGHTY FINAL FIGHT
FINAL FIGHT CD
FINAL FIGHT 2
FINAL FIGHT 3
FINAL FIGHT REVENGE
FINAL FIGHT ONE
FINAL FIGHT: STREETWISE

FINAL FIGHT



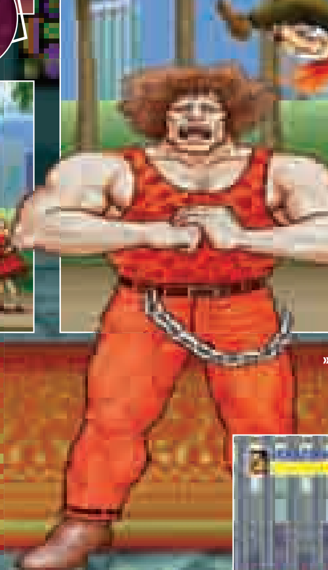
» Grabbing Edi's gross, used gum when you're energy level's full grants a rather spiffing 42910 points in celebration of Nishitani-san's birthday!

"IF TRUTH BE TOLD, THE ONLY THING WE EVER CHANGED WHEN TESTING IT AS STREET FIGHTER '89 WAS THE LOGO" AKIRA NISHITANI



» Upon completion, Guy "persuades" Cody to get back together with Jessica. What are friends for?





» "I suppose Roxy and Poison could be male. We were mildly concerned about getting sued by a feminist group if we beat up women in the game. Whatever you see, that's what they are!" Akira Nishitani comments, regarding the much debated gender of the enemy characters. They look like chicks to me (at least in the arcade version).

THE BEEF BOWL

A game isn't great unless it's thoroughly infused with hidden references and Easter eggs, and Nishitani let the lid off some beauties from *Final Fight*. "In Japan everyone knows about a technique called "alchemy". When you smashed up the bucket and drum in *Final Fight*, if you could hit the right button at the right time the items change into lump of gold or a diamond. These are worth 10,000 points each, so it's an indispensable technique for a high score chaser! "You can get big points on level three, as well. If your character has full energy and picks up the gum which the boss, Edi E, spits out, you receive 42910 points. This is a courage bonus for taking someone else's gross, spat out gum. The reason you score that strange amount is "42910" is my date of birth – 42nd year of Showa Era [1967], September 10th. Also, if you complete the last level on just one coin, you see the special ending. In Japan, it was called the "*gyudon ending". I'd love your readers to see this awesome ending, but I don't know if foreign editions have it or not. If not, please buy the Japanese edition!"
*Gyudon: literal translation – beef bowl. Don't ask me!



» For those of you who don't have a Japanese version of the arcade machine (shame on you), here's a few clips of the gyudon ending. We can only guess who's who…

future of entertainment is in movies! I'm installing ten TV screens for you. Watch as many different kinds of movies and information as you can find! And, from now on, when you develop a game, you must make its image first!" He ordered us just like that, so from that point on we approached our planning and design as if it were a movie." recalls Akira.

This remark resounds profoundly with another well spoken rumour about the origins of *Final Fight*'s back story. A considerable number of parallels can be drawn between the game and the 1984 cheese-ball gangster movie, *Streets Of Fire*. Without hesitation (or regard for a conscious breach of Japanese etiquette), the question of their possible relationship is fired at Mr Nishitani. There's a disconcerting pause before his answer arrives although, mercifully, it carries his good humoured lilt.

"Hmm. At the time, we certainly weren't aware of *Streets Of Fire*, but I've just Googled it and there does indeed seem to be something familiar about it. But then again, this style of story was very popular back then. Lots of fighting games made use of it. I guess we were part of that crowd!" he chuckles, apparently impressed by the investigative prowess fans of his game have gone to over the years.



» A keen eye will notice the phrase "NiN" cropping up throughout Capcom's back catalogue, courtesy of Mr Akira Nishitani.

While we were on the subject, I decided to clarify a couple of other possible allusions from *Final Fight*'s antagonistic cast – specifically Andore, look-alike of the late American wrestler Andre the Giant, and the numerous rock band references.

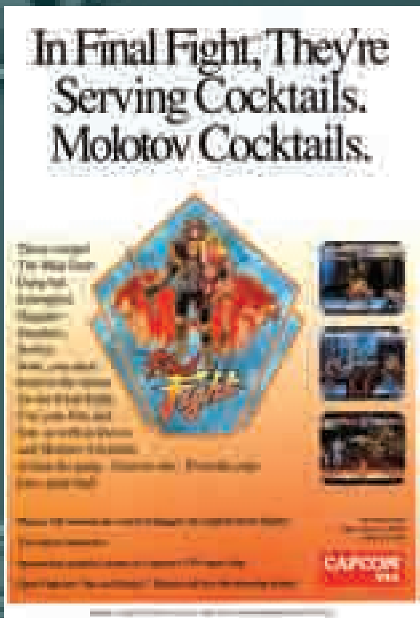
"I have a friend whose nickname is "Andre", and it's actually him who the characters in *Final Fight* are named after. Of course, I have to admit those characters do look like Andre the Giant, though. Also, we had a woman co-worker who we asked to list as many names as she could think of for our characters. She was really into rock music, so that's why lots of them turned out to be named after band members!"

So it would seem that, despite its clear and defining integration of Eighties pop culture, *Final Fight* is more a part of that ethos than a collection of references to it.

BUILDING METRO CITY

While the basic premise of *Final Fight* might not have blazed any particularly new trails, the gameplay mechanics certainly redefined the way we interacted with the beat-'em-up principle. Of particular note in *Final Fight* are the dramatic differences of the playable characters Guy, Cody and Haggar. The three protagonists offered distinctly individual gaming experiences, allowing players differing gameplay depending on their mood or fighting preference. Whether the player preferred speed and skill over brute force and ignorance, *Final Fight* was the first beat-'em-up to offer that choice.

"This was a feature that took quite a long time to implement. In the end, we prepared the three characters you see in the game as we thought they offered the greatest choice. It just wouldn't be as exciting if they didn't each have a



» "I went to San Francisco once to see *Final Fight* at its first test location. I was so excited, as it was the first time I'd ever been abroad!" Akira Nishitani.



» "I also remember changing the demonstration screen for an overseas version, to try and tone down any sexual elements." – Akira Nishitani. On the left, the Japanese attract screen (and it certainly does!). On the right, the Mary Whitehouse version.



» The second bonus round is considerable tougher than smashing up the car. Break the glass without getting close enough for it to knock your teeth out.



» The 3D one-on-one *Final Fight Revenge* was actually pretty damn good, even if it went mostly unnoticed.

"THIS IS ACTUALLY THE FIRST TIME I'VE EVER HEARD OF FINAL FIGHT: STREETWISE! GOOGLE IS REALLY USEFUL!" AKIRA NISHITANI

different journey through the game", Nishitani explains.

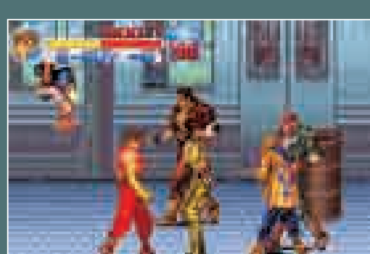
Since each playable character had their own moves and their own stylings, the character design work was effectively triple what a developer would expect. This quality of design and depth of dedication is visible throughout *Final Fight*, resulting in the some of the finest character and background graphics a beat-'em-up had ever seen.

"My real challenge was the deep, pseudo 3D space, and how the large sprites interacted with it. There are so many concerns when it comes to adding details to a level. For example, if we add an oil drum, it adds all kinds of processing difficulties. Can the characters climb on the drum? If so, what happens when another character destroys the drum while they're stood on it? Can we have one drum on top of another? It creates a lot of problems, but these details are important and we wanted to create a high quality game!" Akira laughs, fondly reminiscing about difficulties that, at the time, would undoubtedly not have seemed quite so funny. And yet he's quite correct – true greatness is in the small details. He continues: "Visually I wanted big and detailed characters. I'd liked to have added more enemies and animation frames, and even though *Final Fight* had very good optimising software and the CPS1 board was technically superior, there were as many budgetary and time limitations as there are these days.

"However, I believe that despite those limitations, *Final Fight* was still the best performance game of the time."

PENULTIMATE FIGHT

Final Fight was only really brought back to the arcades in spirit, and not by way of a direct sequel (most notably in the superb *Aliens Vs Predator*). Its real legacy lies with the SNES, though conversions and sequels have seen both success and controversy. Most recently, of course, is the PlayStation 2/Xbox *Final Fight: Streetwise*, though reviews were not kind. I hoped Akira might be able to explain the somewhat shaky philosophy behind this most recent conversion.



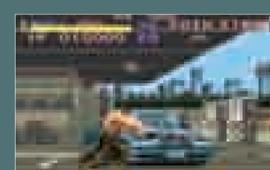
» One of the best conversions of *Final Fight* is to be found on the Game Boy Advance.

"I was only involved in the development of the original *Final Fight* coin-op," says Nishitani, once again turning to his computer for a bit of on-the-fly research, "and this is actually the first time I've ever heard of *Final Fight: Streetwise*! Wow! I see it's certainly based on our old game, but I'd never heard of it until now. Google is really useful!" he laughs, showing no signs of the disgruntlement he's more than entitled to harbour toward such uninspired use of his original work.

Despite the industry's trend for deliberately avoiding the wealth of established talent when it comes to reimagining classic games, Akira still has a very fond place in his heart for *Final Fight*, and the horizon harbours a glimmer of hope for a sequel that might finally do justice to the original.

"*Final Fight* is an immortal game, but lately I hardly see any kind of action games. We once again need more interesting varieties, just as we did when we created *Final Fight*. I have lots of detailed ideas, and if I had the chance I'd love to develop a new version."

Eep!



SMASHING!

Game designers had dipped their toes in the shallow pool of between-level-bonus-rounds before, but none had delivered such delectable lashings of unnecessary violence as in *Final Fight*. Nishitani-san told us more about car repairs on the streets of Metro City.

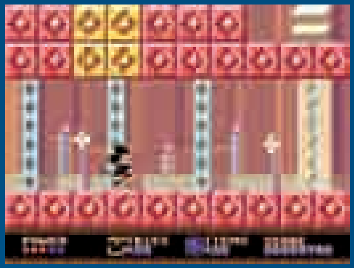
"We definitely wanted to have crash bonus round, and had many ideas, like destroying a piano and a house. There was another idea we developed but didn't use in the end, where players had to beat bad guys until they were buried in the ground up to their shoulders! We decided in the end that smashing up a car would work better visually, however.

"Also, around that time, I don't remember the exact details but there was something in the news about Japanese cars being destroyed because of some Japan-bashing sentiment. That might have affected our decision, too!"

TOP 2
PLATFORME
OF ALL TIME



The votes have been cast. The lights are beginning to dim. Your host David Crookes is looking nervous. Earlier this year Retro Gamer asked readers to vote for the best platform games of all time. And today, we present the results. Which game will be top? Let's find out…



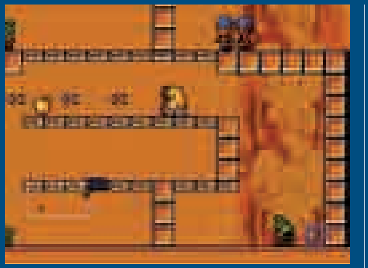
Castle Of Illusion

Year: 1990

Systems: Mega Drive/Master System/Game Gear

Publisher: Sega

Now this is what platform gaming is all about – stomping around a series of levels in a large magical castle, defeating enemies by jumping on their heads, collecting apples or marbles, and gobbling health pills. All you needed to do was hit A or B to throw things and C to jump. Simple. It's no wonder *Castle Of Illusion* was so well loved. It was one of the first essential games for the Mega Drive. It starred Mickey Mouse trying to get girlfriend Minnie back from wicked witch Mizrabel. But more importantly, Sega's machine suddenly had a Nintendo-esque platformer with the added bonus of Disney-like visuals. "It was one of the earliest platformers that I remember back in the days," says Retro Gamer forum poster thl. "Very colourful and still enjoyable to play."



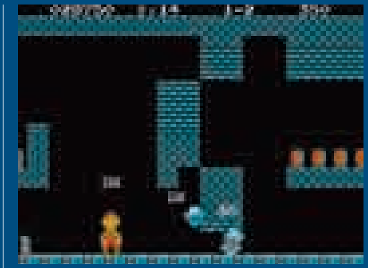
The New Zealand Story

Year: 1988

Systems: Arcade, Spectrum, CPC, C64, Amiga, Atari ST, NES, Master System

Publisher: Taito

With its fluffy, cute characters, *The New Zealand Story* was an instant hit. Which is why it ended up being converted to pretty much every home computer of the day. And with much justification. Here was Tiki the Kiwi in a battle to rescue his mates from the clutches of a leopard seal (which became a walrus in the home versions). Armed initially with a bow and arrow, Tiki could shoot at his enemies, then collect any random tat they left behind – often a range of new weaponry with which to blast through the levels. Annoyingly, you had to restart the levels after just one death but the game (known as *Kiwi Kraze* for the American NES market – see that gnarly alliteration?) remains an undoubted classic.



Super Mario Bros

Year: 1985

Systems: NES, GBA

Publisher: Nintendo

"Shigeru Miyamoto is a truly visionary games designer," says *Broken Sword* creator Charles Cecil. And he's absolutely right. If ever there was a game that single-handedly reinvented a genre, then this was it. *Super Mario Bros* not only helped to save the videogame industry as a whole following the infamous American videogame crash of 1983, but it also altered the way that platform games were created and it put creator Miyamoto firmly on the pathway to legendary status. Phew, that's quite some achievement for a 22-year-old game. *Super Mario Bros* saw the plumber trying to rescue Princess Peach in that bounce-on-heads, gather-coins, avoid-death manner that became so copied from the moment this game hit the shelves. Truly wonderful.

Tomb Raider

Year: 1996

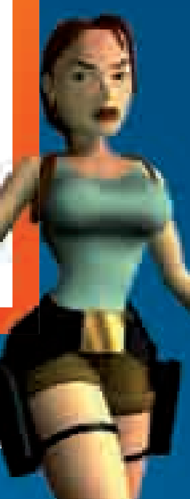
Systems: Sega Saturn, PlayStation, PC, Mac, N-Gate, Pocket PC

Publisher: Eidos

"I have to admit I always found it hard to relate to the highly educated lady with fake breasts who wears her little sister's shorts while breaking into sacred sites, stealing ancient relics, and shooting all the endangered animals she encounters," laughs Lorne Lanning, creator of the superb *Oddworld* platform games (which is sadly left out of the Top 25). Lanning is, of course, talking about Lara Croft, the digital 'it girl' star of *Tomb Raider*, who made her debut trawling a rich and lavishly produced environment that pushed the 3D platform genre to fresh heights. Spread over 15 chapters, *Tomb Raider* rarely bored. The story was involving enough but as Lara worked through claustrophobic chambers and vast hallways, solving puzzles and fighting beasts, it was obvious a new chapter in platformers was being written.



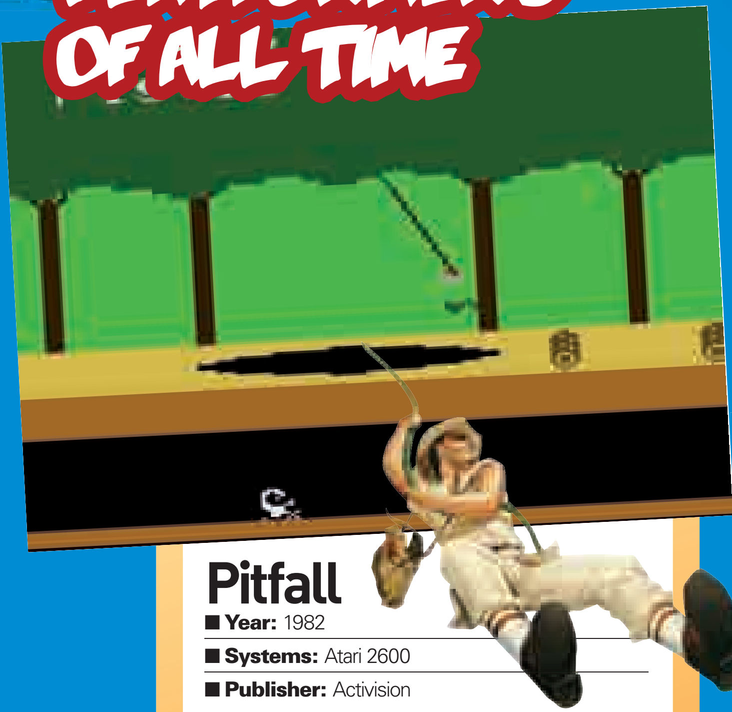




"I always found it hard to relate to the highly educated lady with fake breasts who wears her little sister's shorts while breaking into sacred sites" – Lorne Lanning on Tomb Raider

AS VOTED BY retro GAMER READERS

TOP 25 PLATFORMERS OF ALL TIME



Pitfall

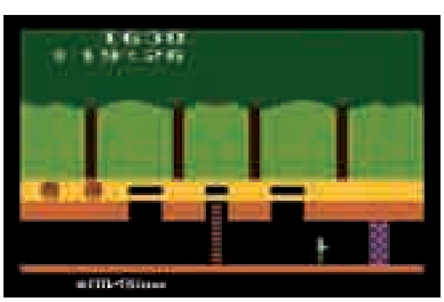
■ **Year:** 1982

■ **Systems:** Atari 2600

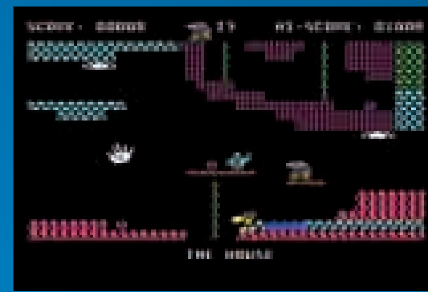
■ **Publisher:** Activision

21 **David Crane created the concept** of *Pitfall* in ten minutes and spent a thousand hours programming it. It sold a staggering 4 million copies. Popular? You betcha. This pre-*Super Mario Bros* game was special. You controlled Pitfall Harry in his quest to collect as much treasure as possible in just 20 minutes while avoiding dangerous pitfalls, scorpions, open camp fires, rolling logs, deep lakes and alligators. Gain 20,000 points or more and a Pitfall Harry Explorer Club patch was yours. "As a kid, I obsessively mapped all 255 screens to work out short cuts since one screen underground equalled three above," recalled fan Ian Malcolm, legendary game designer for Ozzie outfit Melbourne House. "It enabled me to collect all the treasure in under 20 minutes and finish with a perfect score of 114,000. I'm still waiting for bloody Activision to send my award patch though."









Monty On The Run

■ **Year:** 1985

■ **Systems:** Spectrum, C64, CPC

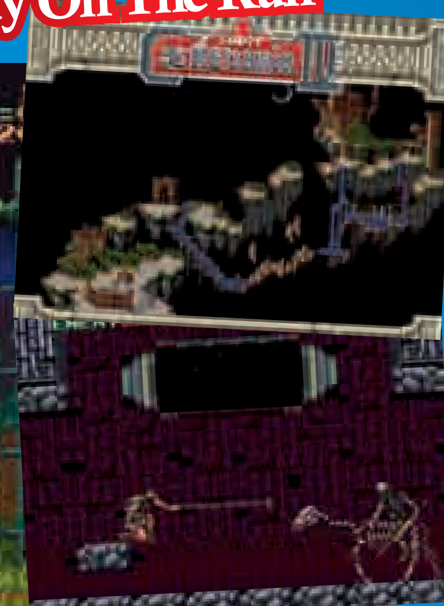
■ **Publisher:** Gremlin

20 **Who says politics can't be fun?** Peter Harrap proved that mantra wrong with this follow-up to *Wanted: Monty Mole*. Having been jailed due to his intervention in the miners' strike of 1984-85, Monty had escaped and was on the run. His destination was freedom in mainland Europe and along the way he had to collect objects and solve puzzles. "It was the first game I loaded up on my new Speccy all those years ago," says Retro Gamer reader and forum regular Sputryk. "It's still as tough as ever. It's colourful and controlled. And it has a somersaulting mole." The action was maintained with additional features including teleport devices – some safe, some not – and lifts, a few of which had dodgy cables. With a combination of platform jumping, skilled timing and adventure, *Monty On The Run* was a winner.



"It's still as tough as ever. It's colourful and controlled. And it has a somersaulting mole" – Sputryk on Monty On The Run





Super Castlevania IV

■ **Year:** 1991

■ **Systems:** SNES

■ **Publisher:** Konami

19 **This remains an awesome** game. While some titles age, *Super Castlevania's* appeal lives on. It's no surprise that it has been recently dusted off for the Virtual Console with a whole new generation of gamers able to see how old-school vampire slaying used to be done. What will these newbies see? Simply, an elegant game with music that continues to amaze 15 years on, visuals which are incredibly detailed, a huge range of monsters and a large number of secrets to uncover. And you can flay your enemies to pieces with your trusty whip. British videogame developer Raffaele Cecco, creator of *Cybernoid*, remains impressed. He told us: "I loved this one. Good graphics, great music and loads of different baddies and bosses. Along with the horror theme and classic platform and puzzle elements, this was a highly atmospheric and addictive game. The multi-use whip for killing and swinging around was a nice unusual twist too."

What happened to?

You're probably looking at this top 25 and asking 'why has so and so not been included?' The following are some of the games that you voted for, just not in enough numbers

SUPER METROID,





Bruce Lee

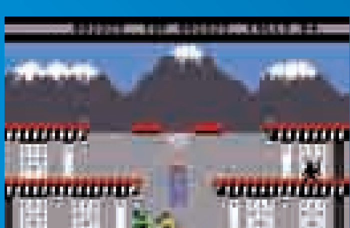
■ **Year:** 1984

■ **Systems:** Spectrum, CPC, Apple II, Atari, C64, DOS, MSX

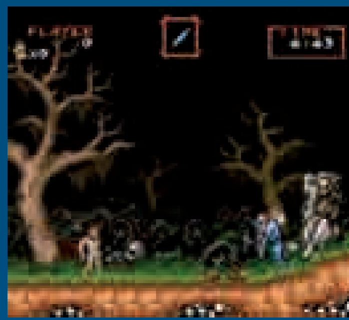
■ **Publisher:** US Gold

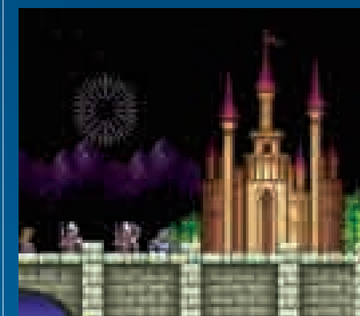
18

When actor Bruce Lee wowed audiences with films such as Fist of Fury and Way of the Dragon in the late 1970s, a videogame was inevitable. And this was it. Some said it was too easy – punching and kicking was certainly simple to perform. Others loved it. Darren Melbourne, the development director of Ironstone Partners which is the licensing company that controls the Epyx back catalogue, says: "A fantastic game, an utter, utter classic! What made this game so stand-out was that there were only two adversaries in the whole game. Can you imagine that these days? You had a big green sumo and a little black ninja (which my mates and I called Glen – I don't know why) and quite honestly you didn't need any more. You couldn't beat the joy of getting the ninja and the sumo to attack each other by accident."

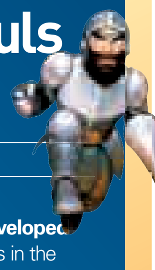








Super Ghouls 'N' Ghosts



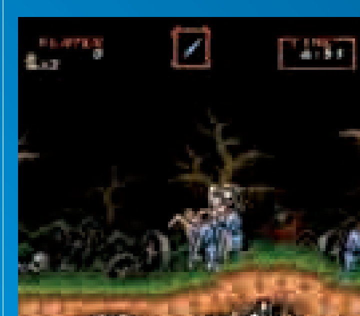
■ **Year:** 1991

■ **Systems:** SNES

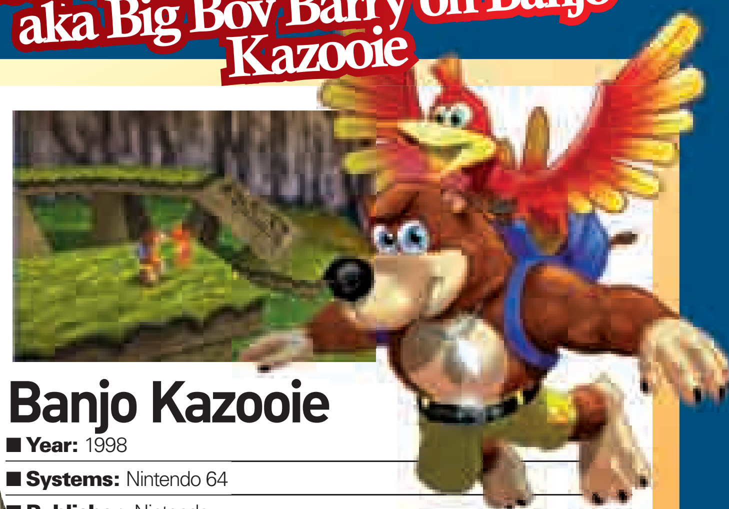
■ **Publisher:** Capcom

17

Capcom has developed some classic titles in the past (think *Street Fighter II*) but *Super Ghouls 'N' Ghosts* was amazing. Hot on the heels of arcade games *Ghosts 'N' Goblins* and *Ghouls 'N' Ghosts*, *SGNG* came out for the SNES and was so well received it ended up being ported to more consoles than you could ever have the spirit to play (groan). Ahem. This game knocked people out right away with its truly exceptional graphics. The snow storm, the sinking ship… with its multi-layer parallex-scrolling backdrops, *SGNG* had awesome effects. The plot may have been an oh-so familiar story about how Knight Arthur was due to marry fiancee Princess Prin-Prin only for her to be kidnapped by a huge demon but as for the rest… wow. It's another worthy addition to the Virtual Console with rumours of an Xbox Live Arcade version and possibly even one for the PS3's online network. And it's one that you readers rightly recognise as one of the top 25 platformers of all time.



"On paper this one is maybe better than Super Mario 64. It looks better, is longer and often far deeper" – Joytech's Alex Verrey aka Big Boy Barry on Banjo Kazooie



Banjo Kazooie

■ **Year:** 1998

■ **Systems:** Nintendo 64

■ **Publisher:** Nintendo

16

"If anyone could rival Nintendo's mastery of the 64-bit era it was Rare," begins Joytech's Alex Verrey aka Big Boy Barry. "On paper this one is maybe better than *Super Mario 64*. It looks better, is longer and often far deeper. Fiendishly tough in later levels, too, it kept me playing right to the very end."

Looking and feeling similar to *Mario 64*, *Banjo Kazooie* was nevertheless an inspiring and innovative game, even if some wrote it off as a mere clone. Developed by Rare, this 3D platformer was about Banjo the bear and his bird pal Kazooie. The story? One of kidnap, this time Banjo's sister being snatched by witch Gruntilda. Yawn. What do you know, Banjo and Kazooie have to rescue her. Double yawn. But wait. Play it and you find that this visually stunning game has many original features.

For a start, there was a wide range of moves. Aside from the punching and jumping, you could swim and fly and Banjo could attack in a variety of ways while flipping over objects in that fun platforming way to which we have become accustomed. All the while, a cool soundtrack pumped out and the textured graphics gave the game a visual lift. After playing this game, the dismissive talk of cloning began to disappear. Some even suggested it was the best ever Nintendo 64 game. With it's huge world to explore, it was certainly an epic game with oodles of fun.



ROLLING THUNDER, PITFALL II: LOST CAVERNS, DIZZY, HEAD OVER HEELS, SHINOBI

TOP 25 PLATFORMERS OF ALL TIME



Flashback

■ **Year:** 1992

■ **Systems:** DOS, Amiga, Apple Mac, Archimedes, SNES, 3DO, Mega Drive, Sega CD, Jaguar

■ **Publisher:** US Gold

15

We all love Paris, croissants and the way adopting a French accent can boost your chances of love (well, in some cases, anyway). But when it comes to French videogames, *Flashback* is the top choice – it's the best selling French game of all time, according to the Guinness World Records. Developed by Delphine Software, *Flashback* was snapped up by US Gold boss Geoff Brown and released on a host of computers and consoles. As Brown explains: "Delphine Software approached me in 1992 and was excited by a brand new technique that they had developed called 'rotoscoping.' I was floored by the fluid animation and the way that the character looked.

"The other thing that was unusual is that the screen didn't scroll in the usual way, but slid in when the player neared the edge. This was somewhat retro at the time, but meant lots of levels could be crammed into the Mega Drive version. I did a deal for it there on the spot and all I had seen was one level!

"Given the theme about loss of memory, I came up with the name *Flashback* and Conrad B Hart for the main character. It was a big hit for us."





Castlevania Symphony Of The Night

■ **Year:** 1997

■ **Systems:** PlayStation, Saturn

■ **Publisher:** Konami

14

The first Castlevania was produced 20 years ago this year. *Castlevania Symphony Of The Night* came out ten years ago and like most titles in the series, has stood the test of time. Konami, apparently nowhere near running out of ideas for its vampire game, excelled once again with this release.

Among the fans is RG forum poster Revgiblet who gave us his list of best platformers – then told us he actually hated the genre. Yet *Castlevania: SOTN*, he says, has become the "best platformer ever." He adds: "Anyone who disagrees is wronger than Morris McWrong of Wrong Lane, Wrongshire."

So what is it that makes this game good? *SOTN* is the sequel to *Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood*. Set in a castle, this platform game has RPG elements. The more enemies that are seen off, the more experience points our hero receives. That, in turns, makes him more powerful.

Going against the flow of play of other games at the time, this was a two-dimensional affair but it rapidly attracted a cult following, not least because of its open-ended gameplay.





"This is pure videogaming at its finest. Bright colours, imaginary worlds and sheer, unadulterated fun" – Mikey Foley on Sonic The Hedgehog

Sonic The Hedgehog

■ **Year:** 1991

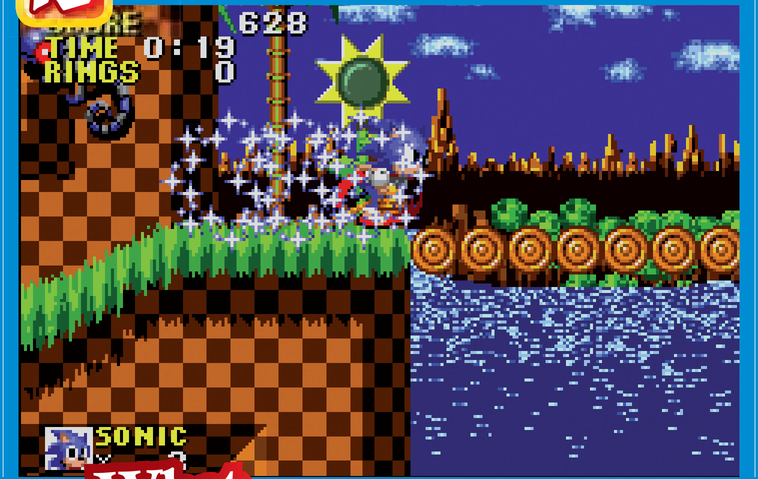
■ **Systems:** Master System, Game Gear, Mega Drive

■ **Publisher:** Sega

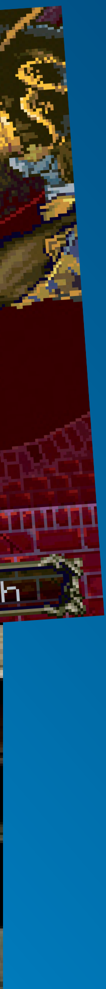
13

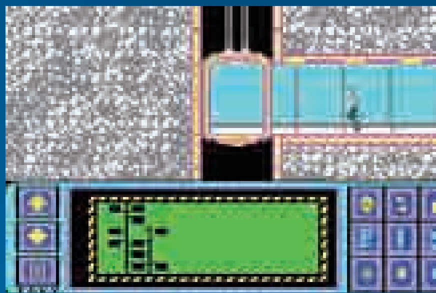
"I played Sonic, but to be honest I got bored with it very quickly and remember very little," says Jon Ritman, programmer of classics like *Head Over Heels*, *Batman* and *Match Day II*. Millions of others, however, were enraptured by the little blue hedgehog, a rival to Nintendo's moustachioed Italian. Okay, so the gameplay was simple and you could finish off early levels quite easily. But as platform outings go, this first appearance by Sonic was not only incredibly well paced but also posed a decent challenge. Later versions put the emphasis on speed over skill and then completely lost the plot," laments Mikey Foley, Koei's marketing manager. "This is pure videogaming at its finest. Bright colours, imaginary worlds and sheer, unadulterated fun." You may have found whizzing around the levels a bit of a breeze but finding all of the secret areas and collecting all the Chaos Emeralds was rather hard work. It's a bit slow on the Virtual Console but on the *Sega Mega Drive Collection* for the PSP, it's definitely worth playing. Retro Gamer forum member Sureshot sums it up: "The subtle blend of speed and precision was unbelievable for the time, and there was always room for an extra level of mastery when it came to knowing the intricacies of each stage. Great stuff."

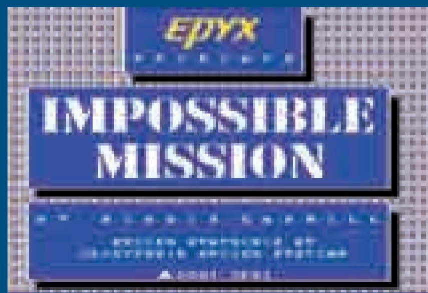




What happened to? JET SET WILLY II: THE FINAL FRONTIER, FLIMBO'S







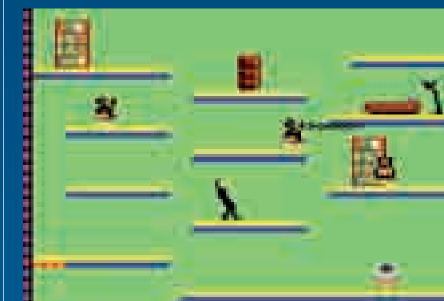
Impossible Mission

■ **Year:** 1984

■ **Systems:** C64, Acorn Electron, CPC, Apple II< Atari 7800, BBC Micro, ZX Spectrum, Sega Master System

■ **Publisher:** Epyx

Essentially a game of skill and timing, *Impossible Mission* had that often-repeated opening line by Prof Elvin Atombender. "Another visitor," he drawled. "Stay a while… stay forever." From then on, most gamers were hooked, running and jumping across platforms from one room to another while doing all they could to avoid the robots and hovering, electrified ball. With a re-release on Nintendo DS, many others are now engaged in the mission: to access computer terminals and escape the complex in which the secret agent finds himself imprisoned. Codemasters boss David Darling says: "The main character was great, especially the way he was animated when running and doing cartwheels. But it was a very difficult game – almost impossible. My brother Richard and I had messed around with Commodores for years – the Pet, Vic 20 and C64. It was hard work getting good SFX out of them so we were especially impressed with the sampled blood-curdling scream in *IM* when the main character fell to his death. Sometimes we'd die just to hear it. I think it was the first time we'd heard digitised, sampled sounds coming out of a C64."



Rainbow Islands

■ **Year:** 1987

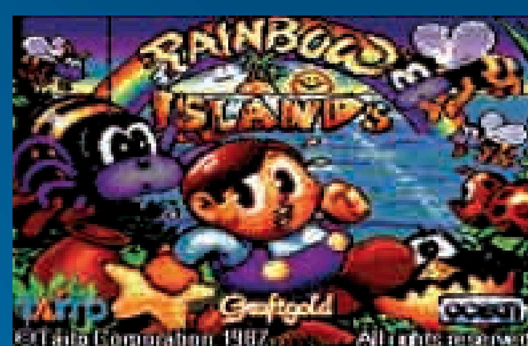
■ **Systems:** Spectrum, C64, CPC, Arcade, Master System, Mega Drive, Atari ST, Amiga, NES, PC Engine, PC

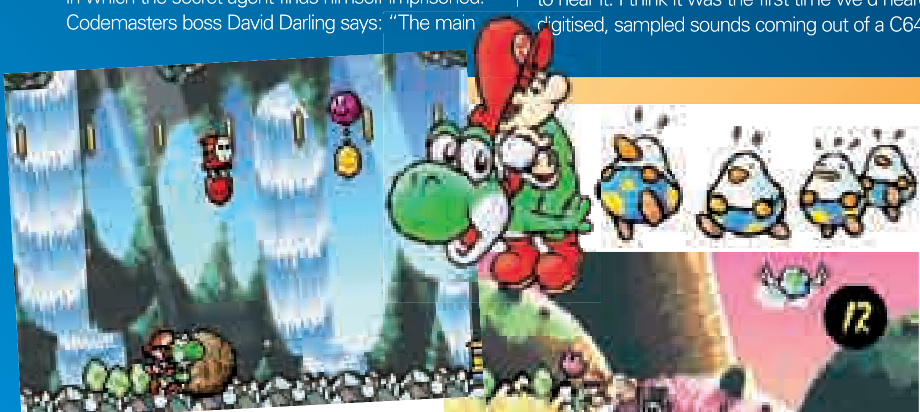
■ **Publisher:** Taito

As a sequel to *Bubble Bobble, Rainbow Islands* was another cutesy platformer, this time seeing you work your way up the screen rather than left or right. Using rainbows as a weapon and as a platform on which to stand, the player battled against a very tight time limit as the ever-rising water level swished up the screen, threatening to drown you. With each level also came a new island to 'explore' and new enemies to annihilate. It soon caught the imaginations of gamers and became a rapid favourite. No stranger to 'best ever' polls, *Rainbow Islands* was number eight in the *Your Sinclair* Top 100. It was number one in *Amiga Power's* annual Top 100 list for years until *Sensible Soccer* knocked it from its perch."

"Because my first (and longest) exposure to *Rainbow Islands* was via Andrew Braybrook's excellent Amiga conversion, I tend to get a little disoriented when playing arcade or console versions with more than one fire button," says game designer Ian Malcolm. "Whenever things get too hairy I instinctively push up to jump, nothing happens, and I die…"









Yoshi's Island

■ **Year:** 1995

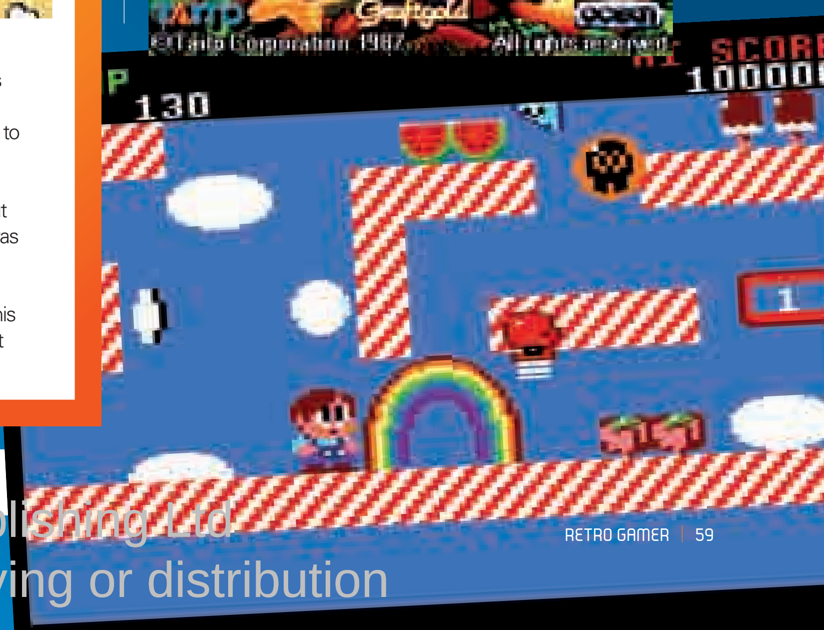
■ **Systems:** SNES

■ **Publisher:** Nintendo

The latter years of the SNES saw some great games being produced. And *Yoshi's Island* – a game so cute you would need a bucket to hand at times – was one of the pearls. The platform genre was given a boost with this game and Nintendo had used its seemingly endless imagination and patient attention to detail to create a title that should be on everyone's shelf.

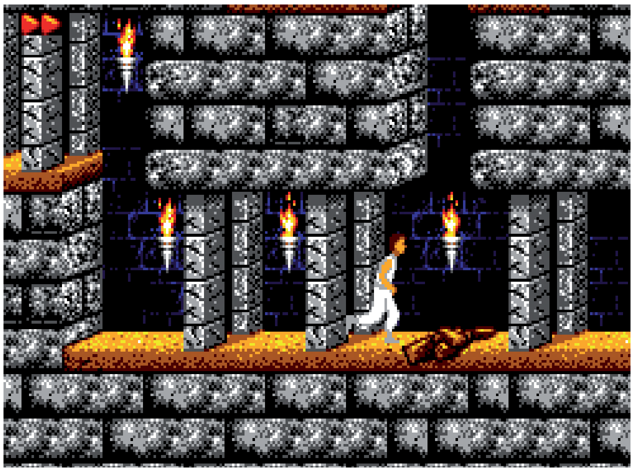
Although the game featured Mario, this time he was a little kid so instead the underestimated character Yoshi became the focus. That, combined with this title coming out at a time when 2D platformers were starting to look old hat, could have meant this game was easily overlooked, and yet it became was one of the best examples of 2D platforming ever made and it was hard not to smile as you played.

The story was good, telling the tale of the yoshis' attempts to unite an infant Mario with his parents. And the implementation was better. By controlling dinosaur pal Yoshi, you could not only gobble up enemies but turn them into eggs which could be thrown at other enemies.



QUEST, SUPER FROG, BIONIC COMMANDO

TOP 25 PLATFORMERS OF ALL TIME



Prince Of Persia

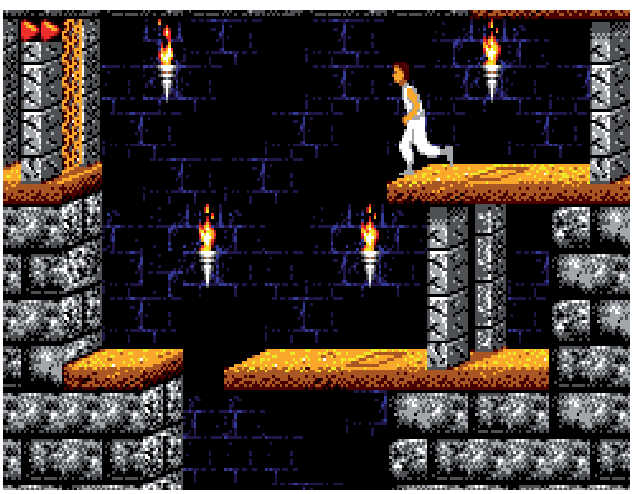
■ **Year:** 1989

■ **Systems:** Apple II, Apple Macintosh, DOS, Amiga, Atari ST, Master System, Sega Mega-CD, Game Boy, Game Boy Colour, NES, SNES, Sam Coupé, Amstrad CPC, ZX Spectrum, Game Gear, Turbo Duo, Mega Drive/Genesis

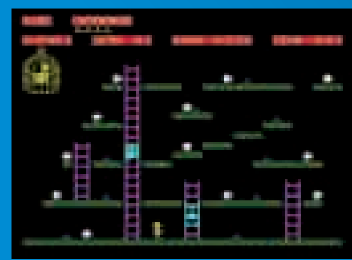
■ **Publisher:** Domark/Brøderbund

9

***Prince Of Persia* was gem of a game by Jordan** Mechner. Expansive and graphically superlative, it became one of the most ported games in history, noted primarily for the fluid, human-like movement of the main character. Mechner had asked brother David to run, jump and squat. Those actions were rotoscoped and formed the basis of Prince's agility. Such was the high quality of the result, the game helped to push 8-bit machines close to their 16-bit successors, and the 13-level game with its strict 60-minute time limit (120 on the SNES) was an instant success. It may have been a flip-screen game – technical limitations on the computers of the day forcing that decision – but the moment you fell, caught hold of a ledge and eased back up, made you forget any shortcomings. Mark Cale, CEO of System 3 Software, recalls: "When *Prince Of Persia* came out it was the animation that really impressed, but the game was great too and I remember playing it all the way through despite the heavy workload we were under developing *International Karate*. *Prince Of Persia* was a landmark title."







Chuckie Egg

■ **Year:** 1983

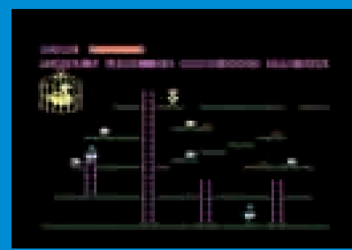
■ **Systems:** BBC Micro, Spectrum, Dragon 32/64, C64, MSX, Tatung Einstein, CPC, Amiga, Atari ST, PC

■ **Publisher:** A&F Software

8

Many people recall playing this on the BBC Micros that adorned the classrooms of many schools in the Eighties. The brainchild of teenager Nigel Alderton, it became available on many other machines but the central idea of collecting a dozen eggs on each level of this million seller remained. Blitz Games boss, Philip Oliver, one half of The Oliver Twins, loved it. "Andrew and I were 15 in 1983 when *Chuckie Egg* suddenly became a craze," he recalls. "We'd just had our first few games published and were busy writing more. We felt big-selling games had to be ones that were hard to write. Yet this very simple game came from nowhere and everyone liked it – including girls that Andrew and I wanted to impress with the games we'd written – but they didn't like our games.

"Up until this point, a good game was a challenging game, yet here you rarely lost a life. It took us a few years longer to conclude that a successful game is about entertainment not about challenges. And I don't think girls will ever be impressed by programming skills."





Bubble Bobble

■ **Year:** 1986

■ **Systems:** Arcade, Spectrum, C64, CPC Amiga, Apple II, MSX, Atari ST, Sharp X68000, NES, Master System, GameBoy, Game Gear, DOS

■ **Publisher:** Taito

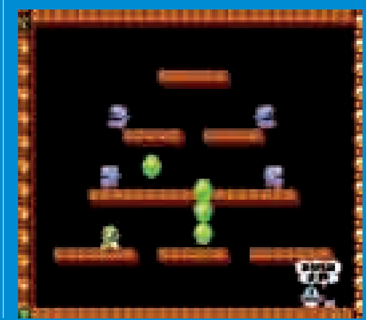
7

Here we have the green dragon Bub, looking resplendent with his yellow spikes, and Bob, in blue with spikes coloured cyan. By blowing bubbles they can trap their enemies and then kill them. Or they can use the bubbles as platforms to get around any one of the 100 levels.

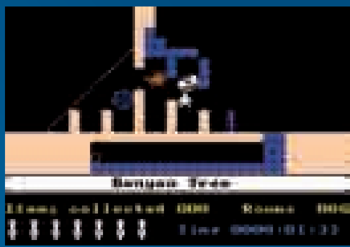
Bubble Bobble went down a storm when it was released and it conjures up so many memories of gaming past that Rising Star Games produced not one but two versions of the game for the Nintendo DS (the dire *Bubble Bobble Revolution* and the rather more promising *Bubble Bobble Double Shot*). *Bubble Bobble Evolution* was released for the PlayStation Portable.

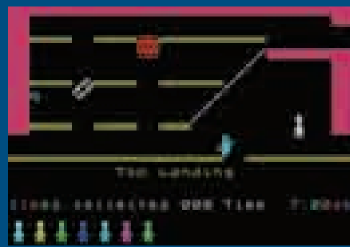
As for the original, it was a love-hate affair. It didn't have a great deal going for it visually but most people adored this game, particularly in two-player mode. The element of getting a friend to join in the fun lifted the game and with bonus points being awarded for collecting all of the letters that make up the world EXTEND, there was more than enough to keep people playing.





What happened to? SONIC & KNUCKLES, METROID, SONIC ADVENTURE, GREAT GIANA SISTERS,





Jet Set Willy

■ **Year:** 1984

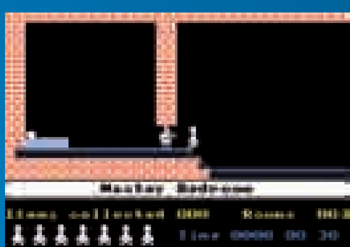
■ **Systems:** Spectrum, C64, CPC, BBC Micro, Acorn Electron, MSX, Atari 8-bit

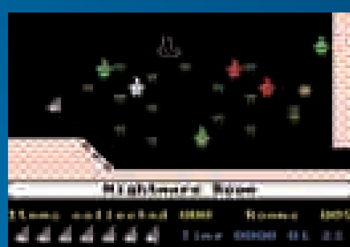
■ **Publisher:** Software Projects

6

Matthew Smith. Genius. Loved by all, and appears in most issues of Retro Gamer. And why? Well, he made games like *Jet Set Willy*, a follow-up to the even better *Manic Miner*… It may have been simple – left, right and jump – but exploring Willy's house was a joy. Former Ocean programmer Mark Jones says: "I remember it like it was yesterday. I went to see my school mate, Neil Anderson, who had a ZX Spectrum and he loaded *Jet Set Willy*. After we'd heard the jolly tune (I'd never heard music on a computer before), Neil played the game and I watched gobsmacked at the colours, the detail and all the bizarre things moving about the screen. There seemed to be so much going on.

"I spent hours trying to get further and further. But I recall the annoying bug that made you lose all your lives if you entered the screen the wrong way so that you died straight away which was then repeated with each life as you watched all of them disappearing from the bottom of the screen. Infuriating."







Sonic The Hedgehog 2

■ **Year:** 1992

■ **Systems:** Master System, Game Gear, Mega Drive

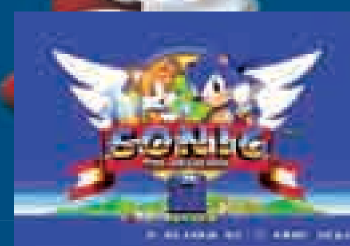
■ **Publisher:** Sega

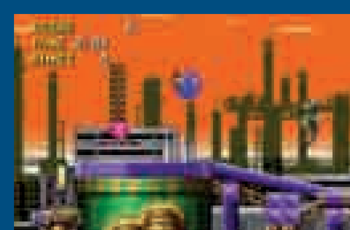
5

With his prickly spikes, Sonic proved to be a true weapon of mass destruction – not only in his toppling of foes as he hurtled through this second adventure, but also in helping Sega win the war against Nintendo. *Sonic 2* was released just after the original was bundled with the Mega Drive. Titbits of information were being leaked about the sequel but it was scarce enough to get excited. So when the release day of Tuesday 24 November 1992 arrived it was dubbed Sonic 2uesday and the sales hit the roof. It ended up becoming the Mega Drive's best-selling title. But was it justified? Yes, indeed it was.

Sonic 2 built upon the first game in the series and was similar in that you ran as fast as possible and collected rings. But spin dashing was introduced, as was Sonic's partner, Tails. A second player could seize control of Tails and the problem of Sonic shooting away and leaving Tails behind was solved by the Tails automatically making his way back to the blue hedgehog. A true blue classic.







Super Mario 64

■ **Year:** 1996

■ **Systems:** Nintendo 64

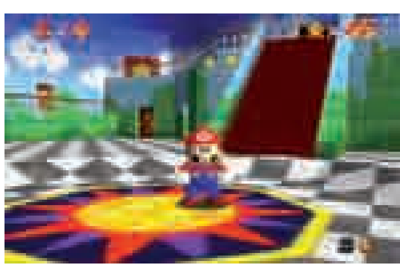
■ **Publisher:** Nintendo

4

It's just over ten years old but it still endears today. As one of the Nintendo 64's launch games, this killer app has recently been made available on the Virtual Console. But it's legacy was clear from the start. For the first time, Mario was in a 3D platform game. And it was a revolution. "I remember when I first played *Mario 64* and being totally amazed at how well they'd managed to portray a real 3D world," says Andrew Oliver, co-Blitz boss. "Before *Mario 64*, most developers were trying to avoid 3D saying it wouldn't work. But Mario proved that it could. The biggest lessons we all got from the game was the control interface and the camera movement."

With more than 12 million sales to date, the game proved popular and those who loved 2D took to it well. Matthew Verran, creator of *Super Mario Pac*, says: "*Mario 64* outclassed its imitators to the power of Miyamoto. It was a working 3D playground yet retains the tactile feel of a 2D game."

David Amor, creative director of Relentless Software, agrees: "I was lucky enough to see a three-level preview version at the Shoshinkai show shortly before the Nintendo 64 launch. I studied it for ages deconstructing how it worked, then hurriedly typed it up on my laptop, plugged it into the nearest phone box and emailed my notes back to my colleagues in Electronic Arts. I would imagine I wasn't the only videogame developer taking notes that day."

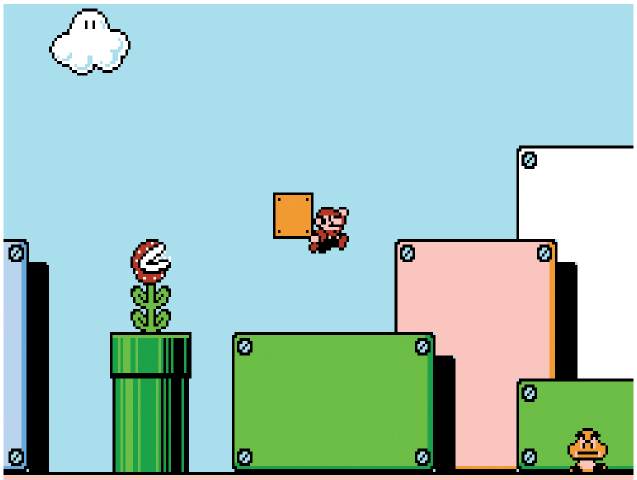




"There's no question about this. If you need it explained you don't deserve to play games" – Tony Coles BHPR on Super Mario 64

STRIDER, CONKER'S BAD FUR DAY, STAR QUAKE, BANJO TOOIE, DONKEY KONG COUNTRY





Super Mario Bros 3

■ **Year:** 1988

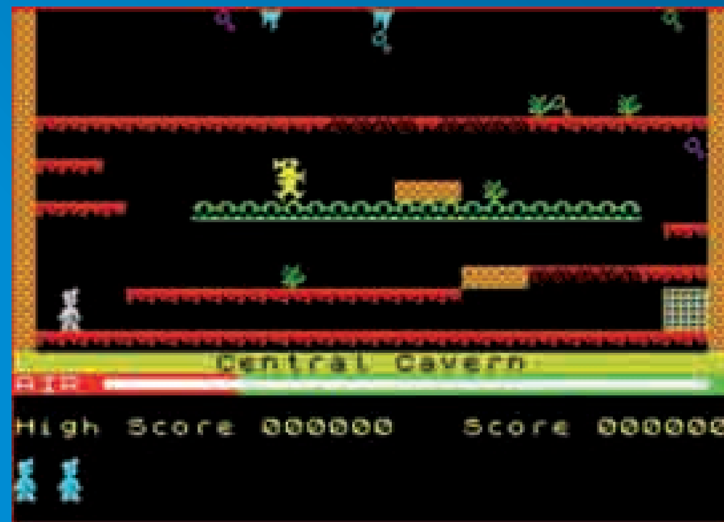
■ **Systems:** NES, SNES, GBA

■ **Publisher:** Nintendo

There's no denying that Nintendo games are popular, certainly among fans of the platformer. And so here we have *Super Mario Bros 3*, yet another Mario game – and our lovely readers believe it is up there with the very cream of the crop. For the first time, we were introduced to Bowser's offspring, the Koopa Kids, but our eyes were also treated to blistering animation, and ours ears basked in the calypso beat of the soundtrack which flipped along nicely. By sticking to the tried-and-tested sidescrolling platformer style of the *Mario* franchise, Nintendo made sure it didn't rein itself in. So Mario could fly, grow and swim. Old power-ups slid along happily with new ones – the Super Mushroom and Fire Flower were back while the warp flute added a neat twist, for instance. Nintendo was most definitely propelling the *Mario* series forward with this game and it was great to see the plumber's return in such a landmark title.

Ste Pickford, graphics guru for a host of games including *Ghosts 'N' Goblins*, *Solar Jetman*, and *Ironsword*, tells Retro Gamer: "When *Super Mario Bros 3* came out, it was jam packed full of new ideas, fresh game mechanics, amazing technical tricks, mysterious secrets, and an incredible number of levels. As NES developers at the time John and I couldn't believe how far ahead of everyone else Nintendo was in terms of game design and depth. It was jaw dropping.

I was truly frightened by the time I got to the eighth world for the first time, which may have been because there was no saved game so our machine had been left on for about three weeks while we played our way to the end." Nintendo's current head of PR, Rob Saunders, also has fond memories of Miyamoto's classic hit. "It's a blueprint for videogames and pure 'Nintendo Magic' at it's best; it was after playing this – I was 12 at the time – that I knew that I would be playing videogames for the rest of my life. Not content with being a big hit on the NES, the game was also released on the Game Boy Advance, as *Super Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros. 3*. Rather long winded but the game was snapped up, each gamer enjoying Mario's attempts to get Princess Peach back – she had been kidnapped by Bowser who had also turned the Kings of each land into creatures.



Manic Miner

■ **Year:** 1983

■ **Systems:** Spectrum, C64, CPC, BBC Micro, Dragon 32/64, Amiga, Oric 1, Game Boy Advance, MSX, SAM Coupé

■ **Publisher:** Bug-Byte Software/ Software Projects

Hey, it's Matthew Smith again. Readers of this great magazine feel *Manic Miner* is the second best platform videogame of all time and who are we to argue with that?

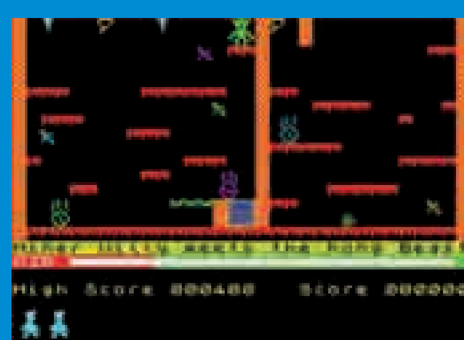
Although the Spectrum had its limitations, Smith managed to do things others thought were impossible. For instance, the in-game music required constant attention from the CPU, something many believed could never be done. Smith cracked it.

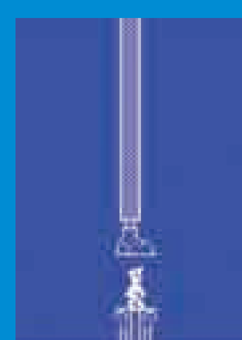
But no one cares about technological advancement unless the game is actually good. And *Manic Miner* was a belter. As one of the most popular computer games of the Eighties, this 20-stage platform titles starred Miner Willy, and was at once bizarre – levels included Attack of the Killer Telephones – and functional since the aim of the game was to collect treasures then make your exit.

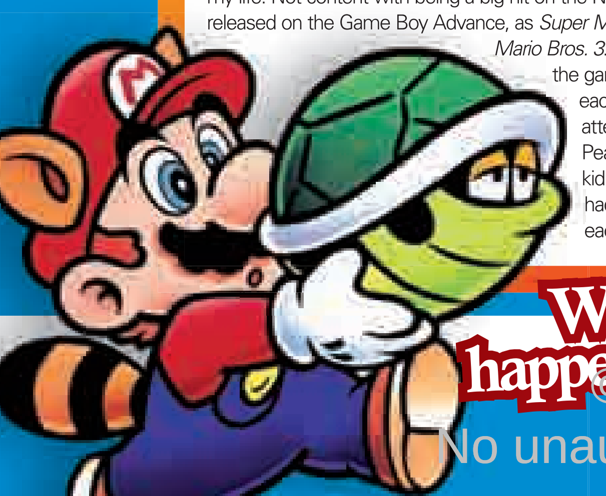
Aside from the killer penguins and the like, the exciting part of *Manic Miner* was in its design. Each screen of colourful characters was carefully put together. The effort behind this game was there for all to see.

Reader Sputryk told forum readers it was "an all-time classic. Still a tough challenge and a game that everyone should have in their collection." While *Earthworm Jim* creator and stalwart game designer David Perry could barely hold back on his praise. "I feel old," he says. "It's 24 years now. I was a big fan of *Manic Miner*. It was such a cool game back then and I think it shared a simple game design rule with the best selling game of all time – *Tetris*.

"Why? Well the thing with *Manic Miner* was when you died it was a hundred per cent YOUR mistake, and you damn well know it, so why not quickly try again, 'Go on, you know you can do it,' you'd think to yourself. *Tetris* is the same. In the simplicity of all of this was beauty. The controls were simple, too, so you couldn't blame them for your mistakes (left, right and jump). The collision detection was also spot on, so really the two things that killed you were your impatience or you not mastering the arc of his jump. Even today the game is still a good challenge."





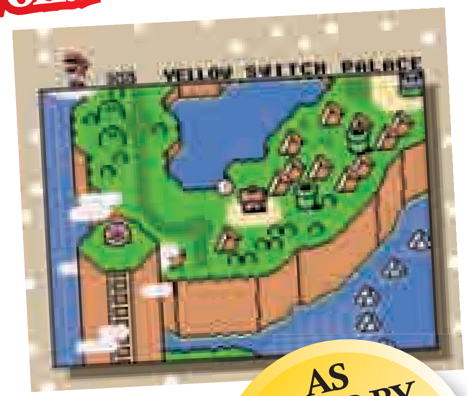


What happened to? CHUCK ROCK, KID CHAMELEON, BAZOOKA BILL,

"Videogaming perfection... nothing more to say..." – forum regular Dizrythmia lays down the law on Super Mario World







Super Mario World

- **Year:** 1990
- **Systems:** SNES, Game Boy
- **Publisher:** Nintendo

This is it. The daddy of the platformers. The number one. The game which you, our dear readers, decided was the best platformer of all time. *Super Mario World* – another Nintendo title, another Mario game – takes its place at the top of the podium, And for good reason. *Super Mario Bros* redefined the 8-bit platforming genre, pushing it to new heights and creating a classic NES game. But five years later and *Super Mario World* was doing the very same for the 16-bits.

It was creating a bright new world, building on the side-scrolling platforming genius of the Mario series and once again involving the kidnapping of Princess Peach. This time there was no American videogame crash so no industry to rescue, but the impact on gamers was just as significant. For with the dawn of the 16-bits came the increased power that allowed Shigeru Miyamoto to play. When he was tinkering with *Super Mario Bros* on the NES, he wanted Mario to ride a dinosaur but the technical limitations of the 8-bit machine wouldn't allow for it. So the first opportunity he got was in 1990 and, in *Super Mario World*, Mario does indeed ride a green monster – Yoshi – and this launch title was all the better for it. "I was working for a magazine publisher on our new launch about this strange new Super Famicom system from Japan, thankfully renamed as the Super NES in the West," says Simon Jones, the director of videogame marketing agency Peppermint M.

"I got given a system and had to choose between the *Street Fighter II* or *SMW* bundle packs so I went for the former and regretted it from day one. At work, I got so hooked on *Super Mario World* that I borrowed my copy from the office and never took it back.

What pulled me in was the introduction of switches that suddenly changed all the levels that I thought I'd already completed. The game has never left my mind, and I'm now playing it again thanks to the Wii."

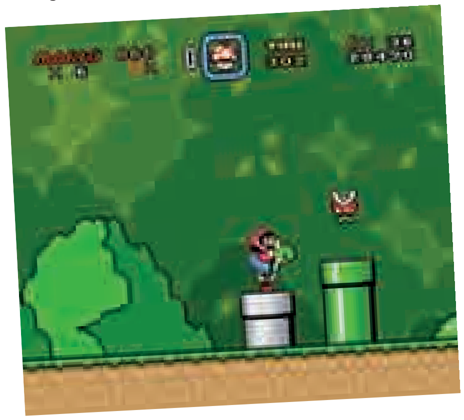
Yes, this game was so iconic, a re-play on the Wii's Virtual Console is proving essential. Once again players can ride Yoshi, stomping on their enemies or using the dino's long tongue to capture them, spit fire at them or fly high into the sky. But not everything is done on the back of Yoshi. When Mario is alone, he can harness a range of useful power-ups.

What is perhaps surprising is that of the two killer apps – *SMW* on the SNES and *Sonic* on the Mega Drive – it was the latter which pulled in the punters. Looking back, as our readers have done, *SMW* was a far deeper and more satisfying game. But the speed of *Sonic* was fresh back then and *SMW* merely continued the usual Mario style, albeit with a world map and a larger playing area.

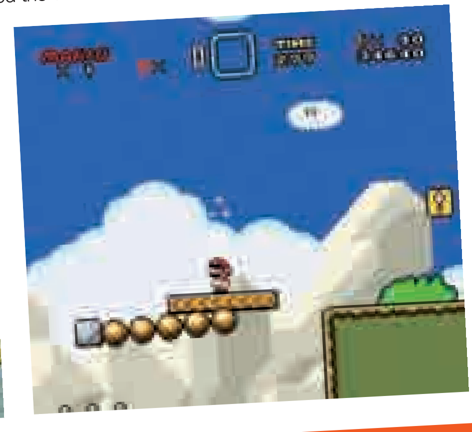
That *SMW* should eventually triumph says a lot for Nintendo. This adventure is as well crafted as any. In fact, no. It's better crafted than them all. Everything has its place and while it may be short in comparison to some of today's titles, the experience is out of this world since the level designs are sturdy and well thought out. The control was perfect.

Richard Leadbetter, former editor of *Mean Machines* and *Maximum*, says: "Some may like *Mario 64* but the N64 controller was wrong for a Mario game. *Super Mario World* on Super NES may not have had quite the same level of imagination, but its control method was perfect – you were totally at one with the character. You never died and blamed the controller or the control method."

An almost faultless game and a well deserved number one.







WONDER BOY, NODES OF YESOD, SOLOMON'S KEY

Is anything missing from this list or is there a game that you feel doesn't deserve the praise? Get onto the forum and make yourself heard. Do it now…

SOLOMON'S KEY

PLATFORMS, BLOCKS AND… MEERKATS?



- **PUBLISHER:** TECMO
- **RELEASED:** 1986
- **GENRE:** PLATFORM/PUZZLE
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £80+ PCB BOARD

HISTORY



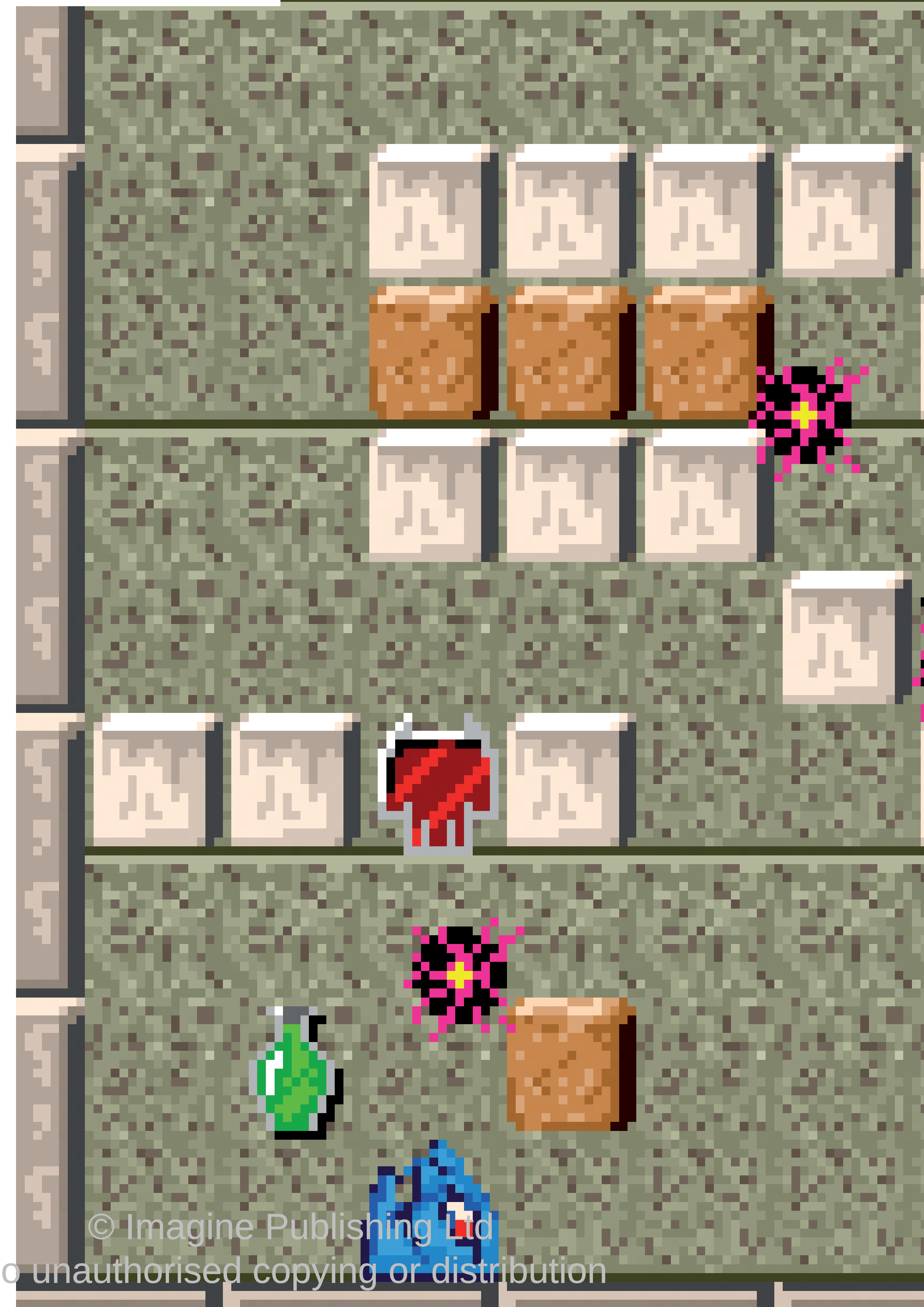
Nowadays, most gamers associate Tecmo with either generously endowed women kicking seven bells out of each other in the *Dead Or Alive* franchise, generously endowed women lounging around swimming pools in *Dead Or Alive Xtreme*, or reasonably endowed women battling horrific spectres and sexual harassment lawsuits. Once upon a time, though, it was all very different. Take *Solomon's Key* for example. Not only was the main character male, but also he wasn't generously endowed in any way – well, he might have been but he covered it up well.

Seriously though, *Solomon's Key* harks back to the good old days of gaming when all you had to rely on was a keen eye, sharp reflexes and steely nerve to find your enjoyment and it was all the better for it.

Part platformer and part puzzler, Tecmo's quirky title required you to do nothing more than retrieve a key and reach the level's exit within a strict-ish time limit. Each stage consisted of a variety of strategically placed blocks and items and, of course, a variety of monsters to block and hinder your progress. Luckily for Solomon he was equipped with a magic wand that enabled him to manipulate most of the blocks that appeared and make them disappear and reappear at will. In doing so, you were able to trap enemies, retrieve seemingly unreachable power-ups and reach that all-important exit before the clock ticked down to zero and you lost a life.

Fairly straightforward to begin with, *Solomon's Key* soon reaches insane difficulty levels and required so much head scratching in places that I actually made an indent in the side of my head that's so large, it's now being used as a breeding hole by a pair of Meerkats.

Despite this small setback, I'm still playing Tecmo's ace little hybrid and I was going to show you the first 12 screens, until I realised there would be no incentive for you to discover them for yourself. Right, better go. Another pair of damned Meerkats have just turned up.





The Definitive Wonder Boy



"WONDER WHAT THEY'RE GOING TO CALL IT THIS TIME BOY, MORE LIKE!", SUGGESTS STUART CAMPBELL, BEFORE LAUGHING UPROARIOUSLY FOR 20 MINUTES. ON HIS OWN.

Batten down the hatches, viewers; this one's going to be messy. When little-known coin-op developer Westone created a simple cutesy run 'n' gun game called *Wonder Boy* in 1986, incredibly few videogaming academics predicted the screwed-up rats' nest of licensing and sub-licensing and rebranding that would result over the following 20 years. This, of course, is largely due to the fact that there WERE no videogaming academics in 1986, but the point still holds. While *Wonder Boy*'s gameplay could hardly be any less complex (it is, perhaps, one of the least deep videogames ever made), the seemingly-undemanding act of knocking out a few sequels and giving them titles created a twisted trainwreck that makes the world of *Contra* (see The Definitive Contra in RG35) look like a simple, straightforward place of easy-going innocence belonging to a backwards agrarian age. Disturbingly – given that he's a small child and has remained so for two decades – Wonder Boy spawned four distinct families of offspring, from simple arcade games reminiscent of the coin-op debut to more complicated adventures of strategy exploration, and countless variants in between. That's if "countless" can mean "two", anyway.

So since I'm writing this intro when the rest of the feature's already done, and therefore already know how far over the word count it's gone, let's have no further ado (whatever "ado" is), and fly away with Coconut Airways into a world of Wonder. Woah! We're going to Barbados! (My wife, by contrast, went to Jamaica. Hang on, I've messed that up.)

1986
WONDER BOY AKA ADVENTURE ISLAND AKA REVENGE OF DRANCON (COUNTLESS FORMATS)

The original *Wonder Boy* was converted to pretty much every 8-bit format in existence, from the Spectrum to the MSX, but not all *Wonder Boy*s are the same. The biggest conversion discrepancies are found in the Master System/Game Gear ports (the American GG version is the only one to bear the baffling "*Revenge Of Drancon*" title), where the final areas of each level are handled entirely differently, and there are also hidden icons which summon a red-haired female character (Wonder Girl?) who flies our hero up into the clouds where he can collect hearts and skip forward to later areas.

Sega had snaffled the copyright to the *Wonder Boy* name, so when the series moved over to other formats in later years (mostly under the auspices of Hudson Soft), it got a new moniker, in the shape of the commendably accurate *Hudson's Adventure Island*. (The "Hudson's" was binned for the PAL NES release – which didn't show up until 1992, four years after the NTSC versions and six years after the original – but as compensation it picked up a "Classic" on the end.) *Adventure Island* is basically identical to the original *Wonder Boy*, except instead of Tom-Tom you play a new character, Master Higgins (complete with baseball cap in place of Tom-Tom's shock of blond hair), the bosses are different, and all the music is new too.

1986 also saw the release in arcades of *Wonder Boy Deluxe*, but this reporter is jiggered if he can find a single noticeable difference between it and the vanilla version.

PLAY IT NOW ON: There's obviously MAME, but for "legitimate" arcade-perfect *Wonder Boy* you might want to check out the PS2's recent Japanese release of *Monster World Collection*, a hugely comprehensive compilation of lots and lots of *Wonder Boy* games (including multiple versions of each one from different formats) with plenty of extra content and features, and which was at the time of writing available from importers like Play-Asia for a bargaintastic £15.

» The same four areas basically repeat throughout all eight worlds of the game. This shot of Level 8.1 is more or less the only place there's any variation from the standard set of island, cave, water and ice-palace settings.



» This is a picture of level 2, just to prove that it can be done.



1986
WONDER BOY (SG-1000)

The first home release of the series, pre-dating all of the 8-bit versions mentioned above, actually appeared on Sega's forerunner to the Master System, the SG-1000. (It stands for Sega Game, if you were wondering.) While it carries the same name and at first glance it seems like the familiar coin-op, it only takes 20 seconds into the opening level to start noticing that this is a radically different and new game. The absence of the trademark skateboard and variable jumping is the first clue, but things really veer off halfway through the stage, when the level breaks up into multiple branching routes and culminates in a boss fight (after just one area, not the usual four) with a big crow in a death's-head tabard. To be honest, there isn't a lot of point in talking about the rest of it, as most of you won't get any further than that. And yes, I *am* calling you a puff.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The multi-Sega emu Meka runs all SG-1000 games. Alternatively, get the *Monster World Collection* mentioned above, which includes the SG-1000 version of *Wonder Boy*.



1987

WONDER BOY IN MONSTER LAND AKA SUPER WONDER BOY MONSTER WORLD AKA BIKKURIMAN WORLD AKA SUPER WONDER BOY IN MONSTER LAND AKA MONICA IN THE DRAGON'S CASTLE (MULTIPLE FORMATS)

With five titles but only one game, *Monster Land* is the most confused of all the *Wonder Boys*, and it's also the best. A radical departure from the original, it's basically a platform game with exploring and RPG elements, and rather than featuring a baby romping around a volcanic tropical island, it's set in a medieval fantasy land called Monster World and the protagonist is a little knight called Book Shonen, with a sword and a shield. (*Monster World*, rather than *Land*, is the generic series name for the *WB* games that are part of this line rather than the arcade line started by the original *Wonder Boy*. For the sake of some sort of clarity in this piece, we'll refer to the semi-RPG-type games as *Monster World* games and the arcadey tropical-volcanic-baseball-hat ones as *Adventure Island* games, regardless of their actual titles) Why it was ever attached to the *Wonder Boy* brand is anyone's guess.

Like many great games, the key in *Monster Land* is that you're your own worst enemy. A large proportion of baddies and hazards can be avoided, but you're constantly tempted to take them on in order to grab bonuses and collect gold coins to buy yourself weapon upgrades, special powers, armour and the like from the many shops. There's almost no pressure anywhere in the game – the pace is relaxed, energy hearts are plentiful and few enemies attack you with any kind of determination – yet you still manage to get yourself into trouble time and again, and the more impressively you equip Book Shonen, the more dangerous opponents and situations you find yourself rashly tackling, which is self-balancing (and therefore totally compelling) gameplay in action.

The names? (Deep breath.) *Wonder Boy In Monster Land* was the name given to the arcade game and the Master System release in the West; the "Super" prefix was attached to the 8-bit computer incarnations by Activision (the Amiga and ST versions had the "Super" on the box, but were just called "*Wonderboy In Monsterland*" in-game); the "Monster World" suffix went with the Sega Mark III version (the Japanese version of the Master System); while the Japanese PC Engine game answered to *Bikkuriman World* (and had a mostly new cast of characters).

And round about now would be as good a time as any to note that in Brazil, where the Master System was quite big news, all the *Wonder Boy* games (including *WB5* on Mega Drive) were adapted to use the characters from a popular comic-book series, Monica's Gang, with different sprites and storylines. (Some sources translate the second word as "Team", because God forbid we should have a *Wonder Boy* game that only had three or four different names.)

PLAY IT NOW ON: Leave me alone.

» Oh, alright. While the Amiga and ST versions are almost arcade-perfect, having to use "up" to jump makes them a pain in the arse to play unless (and it's a big "unless") you can get WinUAE's custom joystick configuration to work. So stick with the beautiful coin-op version in MAME. (Every version is still good, though, so any one you can get your hands on will do in a pinch.)



1988

WONDER BOY 3 – MONSTER LAIR (ARCADE, PC ENGINE CD, MEGA DRIVE)

The next proper release in the series was a return to something much more like the original game, but with a few new tricks (as well as a new hero, a little Flash Gordon dude called Leo, much more closely resembling Book Shonen than Tom-Tom or Master Higgins). The normal levels now have a forced scroll, but each one is also followed with a horizontal shoot-'em-up section after each platform level. You get lots of fancy new weapons too, but *Monster Lair* is a largely uninteresting game designed as a coin-sucking continue-thon. However, the PC Engine CD version has a ridiculously splendid, wildly out-of-place *Miami Vice* soundtrack, which is almost worth tracking the game down for by itself. The Mega Drive port, despite running on considerably more powerful hardware, is incredibly drab and weedy-looking by comparison.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The coin-op is emulated by MAME, but the PCE CD version is more or less arcade-perfect, and has the addition of the deranged-genius soundtrack, so fire up Magic Engine and experience *Monster Lair* that way.



» The shmup sections in particular are designed to kill you off and get you shovelling more credits in. With emulation, of course, that isn't a problem. Except with the Mega Drive version, which limits your continues. Gah.



1989

WONDER BOY III – THE DRAGON'S TRAP AKA ADVENTURE ISLAND AKA MONSTER WORLD 2 AKA DRAGON'S CURSE AKA MONICA'S TEAM – THE RESCUE (MASTER SYSTEM, GAME GEAR, PC ENGINE)

Now we're starting to get in a real tangle. Despite being called *Wonder Boy III* (except on the Game Gear, where the "III" from the Master System version's name was left out in Western releases), this is a totally different game to the arcade *Wonder Boy 3*, and despite the Japanese PC Engine version (released in 1991) carrying the Adventure Island name (except in the US, where it was released for the Turbo Grafx under the Dragon's Curse label), it's a *Monster World*-type game (indeed, in Japan the Game Gear version, whose levels have substantially different layouts to the Master System and PC Engine titles, was called *Monster World 2* with no mention of *Wonder Boy* at all), not an *Adventure Island* one. Hngh.

Firstly, if you made it through that sentence in one piece, well done. Have a sit down for a minute. *Dragon's Trap* is a more exploration-based game than *Monster Land*, but it plays in a very similar manner. Its most notable feature is that as the story progresses you play six different characters with varying abilities. You start off as the traditional sword-wielding toddler (called "Hu-Man"), with a near-invincible energy bar, but on defeating the dragon in the first castle it curses you with its dying breath and turns you into "Lizard-Man", who can breathe fire but carries just a single energy heart into subsequent levels. There are four more animalistic protagonists to "be" later on (Mouse-Man, Piranha-Man, Lion-Man and Hawk-Man), all with their own strengths and weaknesses, so there's rarely a moment to get bored throughout what's a big and challenging game.

With its involved plot and character-changing gimmicks *Dragon's Trap* is probably the most popular of all the *Wonder Boy* titles, and while it lacks the focus and subtlety of *Monster Land* it's still excellent and absorbing stuff that stands in the very topmost echelons of Master System and Game Gear software.

PLAY IT NOW ON: There's little to choose between the Master System and PCE versions, so if you still haven't paid the licence fee for Magic Engine, the excellent Sega emu Fusion is your way in.

» Your stint as Hu-Man lasts barely three minutes and doesn't survive this encounter with the armoured dragon boss.





» The selection of levels seems to be semi-random, and stages can even show up in different worlds from one game to the next – since the worlds are all fairly generic, stages can shift around without looking out of place. Which has nothing to do with this screenshot, I just realised we hadn't had one of him on his skateboard yet.

1990

ADVENTURE ISLAND 2 (NES)

While *Wonder Boy* had veered off into the *Monster World* style of game, the Nintendo incarnation of the series under the *Adventure Island* banner chose a different path. The NES's first original *Adventure Island* was a completely new game, which would define the form for all subsequent *AI* games. Spread across eight multi-area worlds in the same equatorial setting as the first arcade game, this time Master Higgins has some help, in the form of various dragons which can be hatched from eggs lying around on the islands and then ridden around the levels, providing extra protection, firepower and abilities.

The key innovation is that whenever you reach the end of one of a level's short areas with power-ups intact (including the dragons), you can choose whether to carry them through to the next area, or keep them in reserve for later if you think you can manage the section without them or feel confident you'll find some in there. (In this way you can stockpile multiple power-ups against later losses.) This strategic helping hand, combined with the shortness of the stages, makes *Adventure Island 2* a friendly little game that's easy to make progress in, but beware – if you do manage to use up all your lives, continuing sends you right back to the start of a world and loses every stored power-up item in your inventory, and without them you'll find life in the later stages pretty hard going. The only real fly in the ointment of this likeable game is the absence of even a password save, meaning that you'll have to play through the whole thing in one go if you want to see the end.

PLAY IT NOW ON: VirtuaNES.

1991

ADVENTURE ISLAND AKA ADVENTURE ISLAND 2 (GAME BOY)

Apart from what seems to be a fixed ordering of levels, a speed reduction to compensate for the closer viewpoint and the addition of some secret bonus areas, the GB debut of *Adventure Island* is basically the same game as *Adventure Island 2*. Just to add to the confusion, the 1992 Japanese release of this GB game was actually called *Adventure Island 2* (subtitled Bikkuri Nekketou – which apparently translates as "Aliens In Paradise" – in an echo of the PC Engine version of *Monster Land*, to muddy things even more), while the Western versions were simply *Adventure Island*, greatly cheesing off import gamers who bought the Jap game in the understandable but mistaken belief that it was a sequel.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Visual Boy Advance.

» In a concession to handheld play values, continues on the GB game return you to the start of the current area, not all the way back to the beginning of the entire world.



1991

WONDER BOY IN MONSTER WORLD AKA WONDER BOY 5 – MONSTER WORLD 3 AKA THE DYNASTIC HERO AKA MONICA'S TEAM IN THE LAND OF MONSTERS (MEGA DRIVE, MASTER SYSTEM, PC ENGINE CD)

So where's *Wonder Boy 4*, then? In an attempt to straighten out the continuity tangle, Westone and Sega evidently decided in 1991 to retrospectively regard *The Dragon's Trap* as *WB4* (and also *Monster World 2*) and then move on with a clear conscience. Although it might have been nice if they'd cleared up the whole World/Land thing too while they were about it. And if this is *Wonder Boy In Monster World*, where does that leave *Super Wonder Boy Monster World*? (The Mark III game from 1987, aka *Wonder Boy In Monster Land*, if you've lost track.) And that raises another question, come to think of it.

"Monster World was once a peaceful region", runs the intro to *WB5*. "Then the peace was shattered by an invading army of", it continues, waiting again for you to press a button before revealing the answer to be "monsters." It subsequently goes on to explain that a young adventurer called Shion (that's you) has vowed to "defeat them and make his land peaceful again."

But hang on – whose land are we talking about here? Isn't this place called Monster World? Wouldn't it logically belong to the monsters? Get the hell out, you imperialist invader. Anyway, *WB5* is a return in style to *Wonder Boy In Monster Land* (appropriately, since we seem to have returned to one of its names too), and indeed the opening few screens are taken directly from the 1987 game to provide a bit of much-needed atmospheric continuity. Despite that, though, it lacks the charm of its parent, and is a slow-paced and rather twee imitation. You can spend your time a lot more entertainingly than this.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The PC Engine CD version, while endowed with the usual lavish music, is painfully sluggish, so stick with the Sega games on Fusion. Or again, there's the option of the *Monster World Collection* on PS2.



» Just for laughs, here's a picture of the Brazilian "Monica" adaptation of *Monster World* on the Mega Drive. Perhaps oddly, it's still a princess she has to go and rescue.

» No matter how much electricity they might be firing at you, I'm pretty sure that killing tigers is highly irresponsible at a time when global biodiversity is under such serious threat. Bigger picture, man.

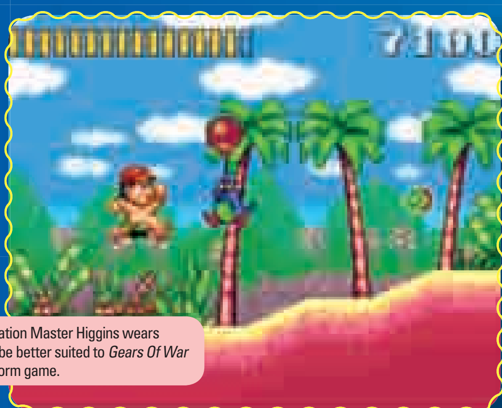


1992
NEW ADVENTURE ISLAND (PC ENGINE)

It's hard to explain why *New Adventure Island* is so enjoyable. In essence it's a completely straightforward game in the same vein as the original *Wonder Boy*, but scratch just a fraction below the surface and you'll find gameplay so sharply honed and tuned that it's elevated to a whole new strata. It's as if some crazy scientists got hold of *Adventure Island*'s DNA and spliced it with *Sonic The Hedgehog* and *Super Ghouls 'n' Ghosts* – this is a game designed so that you can run at full tilt from the start of a level to the end and, if your reactions and co-ordination are perfect, get yourself safely to the finish line even if it's your first try. (Unlike some of the other games in the series, stuff doesn't just materialise in your path – when an enemy or obstacle appears in *NAI* you've always got enough time to do something about it without breaking your stride.) What's much more likely, of course, is that you'll mess up somewhere and be returned to the start of the stage or the midway checkpoint, and have to do it over and over until you get it right, but when a half-stage is only 25 seconds long that's not so much of a problem.

While its predecessors are basically platformers – even when there are no platforms around, it's all about accuracy of positioning and jumping – this is a twitch game, exciting and addictive and constantly pushed along by the jaunty music and bright colours and only slowed up by the marginally out-of-place boss stages. It's by far the most fun of all the *Adventure Island*-type games, and a fine example of the sort of thing the PC Engine excelled at.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Virtual Console or the Magic Engine runs it on a PC.



» The look of grim, angry determination Master Higgins wears throughout the SNES game would be better suited to *Gears Of War* than a cutesy arcade cartoon platform game.

1992
SUPER ADVENTURE ISLAND (SNES)

And here's what's weird about videogames, viewers. *Super Adventure Island* and *New Adventure Island* have, in every obvious sense, the exact same game design. Both are classic-style *Wonder Boy* with big, brash graphics and pure arcade gameplay, with one-hit kills and infrequent checkpoints designed to have you repeating difficult sections over and over until you can make it through intact. Yet while *New Adventure Island* is unarguably the best of the original-model *Wonder Boys*, *Super Adventure Island* is rubbish. For some reason Tom-Tom has been made macho (well, as macho as a chubby boy wearing a grass skirt and a baseball cap can be), the end result being something hideously akin to Danny DeVito in a nappy. Whereas the levels in *New* are laid out in such a way to keep you in near-continuous movement, *Super*'s are fiddly stop-start affairs full of cheap deaths and annoyingly elusive enemies, and worst of all you only get two continues compared to *New*'s endless supply. Add it all together and it makes a mean little game almost bereft of enjoyment, and you'll need the steeliest determination to start again from the very beginning once your measly three credits are exhausted.
PLAY IT NOW ON: The Definitive's favourite SNES emu ZSNES.

1992
ADVENTURE ISLAND 3 (NES)

The third NES game is so similar to the second one that it's almost more of a 12-inch remix than a new game. It's got the same settings, the same dragon-riding shenanigans, the same power-up storage and selection mechanism, the same lack of any kind of save/password facility and (obviously) the same gameplay style – in all the time I spent playing the game for this feature the only thing I found that could be identified as a meaningful difference between *AI2* and *AI3* was that in this one you can discover secret routes which lead to different areas, in the same way as *Super Mario World* (or even let you skip entire worlds, like in *Super Mario Bros*). So it'll save us all some time if you basically just go and read the entry for the previous game again. Thanks.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Here's a thing, though. The first NES *Adventure Island* was ported to the GBA as part of the Famicom Mini series in Japan. It's a flawless, good-looking straight conversion fitted neatly into the GBA screen. However, later on the GBA also saw the release of *Hudson Best Collection Vol.6*, which compiled all four NES *Adventure Islands* onto one cart. Inexplicably, these conversions are rubbish. If they weren't so cynically, disgracefully poor they'd be a perfect way to experience the four games legitimately on a widely available modern format, but as it is I can only advise you to fire up the VirtuaNES instead.

» For extra IntErACtiVe fUN (™), see if you can find this exciting surfing bonus game that's hidden somewhere in the very first area (it's within 40 seconds of the start).



1993
ADVENTURE ISLAND 2 (GAME BOY)

As with the previous generation, GB *Adventure Island 2* is basically the same game as NES *Adventure Island 3*, save in this case for a few very minor differences in the layout of some levels. (And is therefore nothing to do with the *Japanese* Game Boy game called *Adventure Island 2*, covered above. As far as I can tell, the "real" GB *Adventure Island 2* – ie this one – was never released in Japan, which in itself is pretty strange for a Japanese-originated game series that's always been far bigger over there than in the West.) We've already established that there isn't much more to say about this one and we're getting tantalisingly close to the end, so let's move swiftly along.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Visual Boy Advance.



» Ooh, there IS something else to say, actually – this time the Game Boy version does have passwords, which make it a fair bit more inviting for those of us who don't necessarily want to play a single game for hours at a time.

1994
MONSTER WORLD 4 (MEGA DRIVE)

The first game in the *Monster World* line not to mention *Wonder Boy* anywhere in any of its titles (though actually, since it was only released on one format in one territory, it only HAS one title) is also the first one where you don't play a boy at all, Wonder or otherwise. This time you're a green-haired elf girl called Asha, and you have to blah blah something blah blah rescue someone blah blah restore peace somewhere blah blah if I never hear another videogame plot in my life it'll be too soon blah blah. You will fervently wish you were dead before you get off the interminable intro level, and your central nervous system may shut down to protect you from the awful music, but if you can make it past that point you'll find a nippy game that never transcends the formulaic but by its own lights is decent enough fun. If you managed to glean enjoyment from *MW3*, then *Monster World 4* will leave you as happy as a pig in a high-class pig brothel with a free swill bar and satellite TV. Showing, I dunno, *The Muppets Take Manhattan* or something.

PLAY IT NOW ON: *MW4* was only released in Japan, so you'll need to speaka da lingo if you want to play a legit copy, but there's a fairly extensively-translated ROM version kicking around that runs just peachily in Fusion.

» There is absolutely nothing smutty about this screenshot. Behave yourself.





» I'd be nervous too, in the circumstances.

1994
SUPER ADVENTURE ISLAND 2 (SNES)

The storyline to *SAI2* starts off with Master Higgins relaxing on a raft in the middle of the ocean with his "lovely wife Tina" after their "glorious wedding". What? He's MARRIED? Surely he should be MISTER Higgins by now, or there's something VERY unseemly going on in Waku-Waku World. (If anyone thinks I'm playing right to the end of every previous game in the series to find out if there's an established plot explanation for this somewhere, they've got another thing coming right along in just a second, on the end of a fist.) At least our under-dressed hero's marked his newfound maturity by casting off his old baseball cap and replacing it with, er, a Mario hat.

Anyhoo, just in case anyone thought they were starting to get the hang of it all, along comes *Super Adventure Island 2*. *SAI2* is nothing like *Super Adventure Island 1*, and represents something of a hybrid of the *Adventure Island* and *Monster World* games. More than that, though, it also takes the exploring, puzzle-solving and discovering-new-abilities-that-let-you-access-previously-blocked-areas elements of the *Metroid* games, and even throws in some *Final Fantasy*-style random battles as you cross the game world map. So just to be clear, what we're really talking about here is Super Wonder Metroid Adventure Fantasy Island Boy. Once you've adjusted to the new approach it's reasonably engrossing, but if you're looking for a traditional *Wonder Boy* game (of either strain) you won't find one here.
PLAY IT NOW ON: ZSNES.

1994

TAKAHASHI MEIJIN NO BOUKENJIMA 4 (NES)

Mercilessly destroying any last shred of coherence that might have existed anywhere, the fourth NES *Adventure Island* (all of the Japanese games in the series are called *Takahashi Meijin No Boukenjima*, but the fourth is the only one not to have had a Western release and therefore never actually carried the *Adventure Island* title) completely dispenses with the design features of its predecessors, and instead lifts the style of *Super Adventure Island 2*. What you get here is almost exactly the same TYPE of game as *SAI2* (the main difference is that Tom-Tom, or Mr Takahashi as he's actually known in the Japanese games, uses his traditional projectile-throwing attack rather than the punching and sword fighting of *SAI2*) but one that has no other connection to it. The levels are different, the settings are different, the plot is different, the only thing the two games share is their basic genre template.

It works a little better for the SNES title than the NES one – the latter is far too keen to exhaust your small health supply and send you back through large swathes of territory you've already cleared – but there's certainly plenty of challenge here, and it's a pretty good showcase for what the NES could do at the end of its shelf life.

PLAY IT NOW ON: There's no way to legitimately play *TMNB4* in English (and you do need to be able understand the text), but the ROM has been fully translated (right down to the title-screen graphics) and runs in VirtualNES.



» For some reason, in the fourth game you start off chucking bones rather than axes. Maybe it's set in a time before the evolution of tool use.

2004

HUDSON SELECTION 4 – ADVENTURE ISLAND (GAMECUBE, PS2)

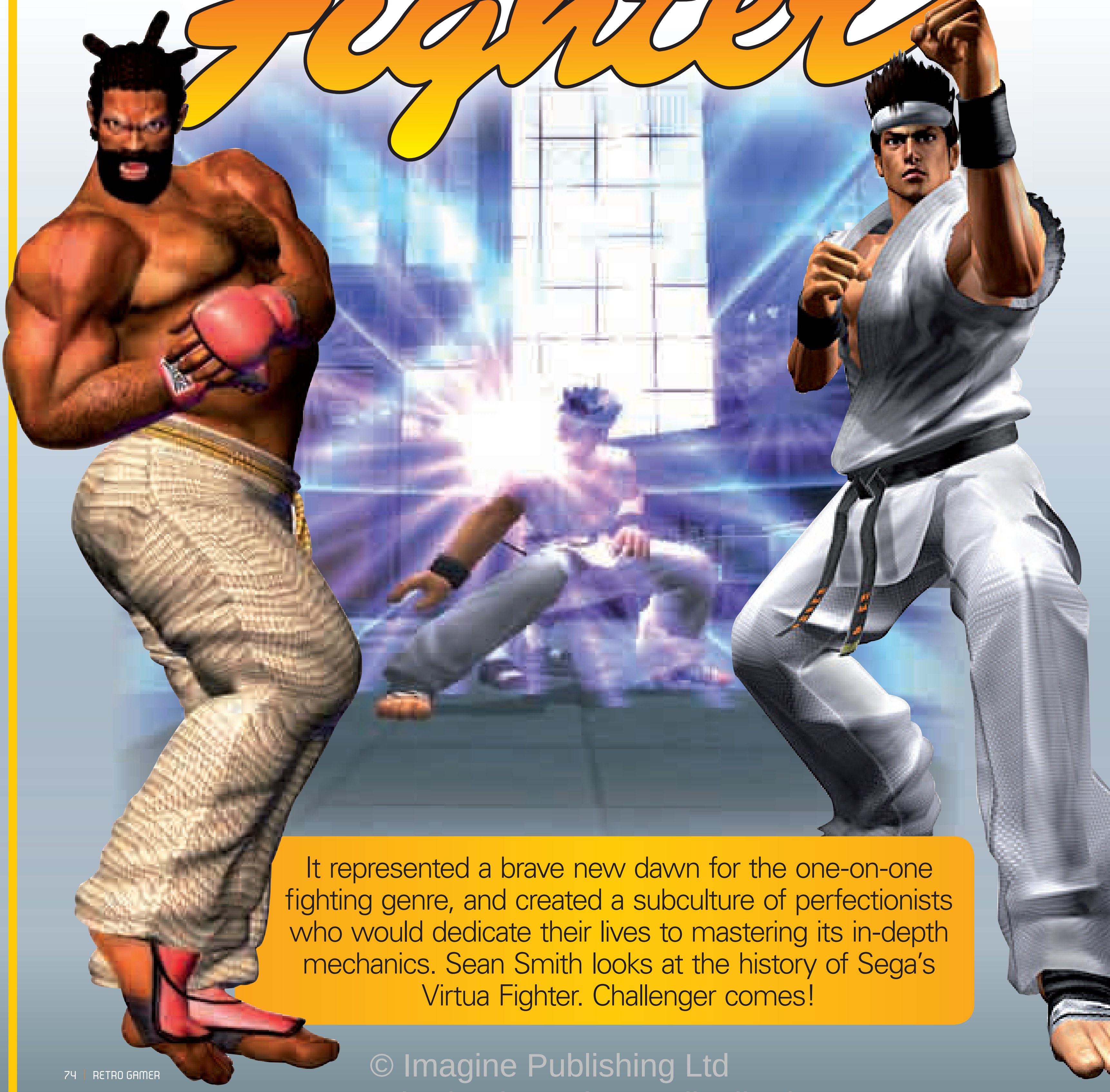
The story of *Wonder Boy* comes full circle with the last release (so far) in the series. The Hudson Selection label (also comprising games such as *Lode Runner*, *Star Soldier* and *Wonder Boy*'s spiritual soul mate *BC Kid*) hosted remakes of big-in-Japan titles originating in the 8-bit era, and *Adventure Island* was the best received of them. Leaving the gameplay untouched (except for the addition of an Easy mode in which, unlike the classic *Adventure Island* games, the health bar doesn't constantly decrease unless you keep eating fruit) Hudson ramped the graphic level up dramatically with a rather lovely Claymation kind of look and remixed the music gently but effectively. After the ever-growing complexity of the sequels (especially if you have to play all of the damn things one after the other), returning to the simple, colourful arcade action is a refreshing lungful of mountain-fresh air. And since I'm sure we could all do with one of those after wading through the mind-torturing labyrinth that is the *Wonder Boy* series, let's all switch our consoles off and go outside into the sunshine. Watch out for giant snakes.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Your import GameCube or PS2. You should be able to pick a copy up for about a tenner nowadays.



» That's an awfully small axe to be throwing at an awfully big snail.

THE STORY OF Virtua Fighter



It represented a brave new dawn for the one-on-one fighting genre, and created a subculture of perfectionists who would dedicate their lives to mastering its in-depth mechanics. Sean Smith looks at the history of Sega's Virtua Fighter. Challenger comes!



» We wanted this amazing image for the cover, but sadly it no longer exists.



» *Virtua Fighter IV* may have ramped up the visuals, but the gameplay was as deep as ever.

Few will forget the first time they saw it running, for real, in their local arcade. At the time, coin-ops were still big business even in Blighty, and your correspondent can clearly remember his bum-fluff encrusted jaw hitting the deck in amazement down at the Super Bowl upon encountering the slick white upright cab, screen a-flicker with something that somehow didn't seem real. *Mortal Kombat* may have wowed all and sundry with its shock-and-awe all-out gore approach and huge rendered sprites, and Capcom had dazzled the world with the wonderful *Street Fighter* series in glorious 2D. But *Virtua Fighter* represented the future, it represented myriad possibilities over the horizon; *Virtua Fighter* was in 3D.

And it wasn't just grass-green Retro Gamer hacks, barely weaned onto 20/20 and ten illicit Bensons who remember back to those halcyon days. Games mag legend Richard Leadbetter, formerly of Mean Machines, Official Sega Saturn Magazine, C+VG and numerous other publications from the golden days of printed gaming media, also got all misty-eyed when we spoke to him recently. "I first saw *Virtua Fighter* in an early preview state at the ATEI show in Earls Court, most likely in 1993. This was the version that had very little of the core gameplay in there, and the Arab gentleman, Siba (an unused character who later turned up in *Fighters Megamix*, fact fans), was still present. I saw it at the time with Julian Rignall and Gary Harrod, my Mean Machines colleagues of that era. This was the time when *Street Fighter 2* was still the greatest fighting game yet devised and we met *VF* with both awe and scepticism. What impressed us was the incredible animation, the realism, the "ooof" factor of the damage you could inflict on your opponent."

Indeed, 1993's AM2 release, which was created by the Yu Suzuki-helmed AM2 development team, was arguably the first 3D fighting game. Earlier PC and Amiga title *4D Sports Boxing* could ostensibly lay claim to this honour, but in terms of mechanics and technical wizardry, *VF* is the daddy. Instead of polygons, it used 3D quadratic surfaces, wireframes and flat shading. It moved along at a slick 30fps, and featured characters whose movesets were directly influenced by real martial arts techniques, as opposed to fireballs, stretchy limbs, and throwing spears through opponents' necks. It was a genuine trendsetter that has proven to be a huge influence on numerous other 3D efforts, from *Tobal*, to *Samurai Shodown 64* via the *Street Fighter EX* series. Namco used many of the concepts present in *VF* when it created its first *Tekken* game, released around a year later in December 1994.

We were lucky enough to have a few words with Sega's Tohru Murayama who acknowledged the monumental depth of gameplay that runs through the series: "It is not complicated in reality, but it gives complex impressions, as we evolved the system to respond to the player's tactics as we have advanced the series. I believe the system allows you to play the *VF* games easily, and to do more things as you play more". And play more people most certainly did, as they realised that there was much, much more to *Virtua Fighter* than just button mashing. Three buttons representing punch, kick and guard were all that was required, and whilst other titles of the era went into button overdrive (*Tekken* had six, for example), true connoisseurs of dust ups in a 3D stylee would choose AM2's creation over any of the other pretenders, something Rich Leadbetter was keen to expand upon: "*Tekken* is burger meat, *Virtua Fighter* is filet mignon. I find the gulf between the two in terms of gameplay to be staggering – *VF* is a game of absolute precision, where complete mastery of the techniques allows you to adapt and fight effectively against any opponent. The biggest difference is that there is no "dial-

"I FIRST SAW VIRTUA FIGHTER IN AN EARLY PREVIEW STATE AT THE ATEI SHOW IN EARLS COURT, MOST LIKELY IN 1993… WHAT IMPRESSED US WAS THE INCREDIBLE ANIMATION, THE REALISM" RICHARD LEADBETTER



» Virtua Fighter Remix: a tribute to the fans, or a cynical marketing ploy? You decide.



» The Saturn version was solid and proved it was no slouch in the 3D department.

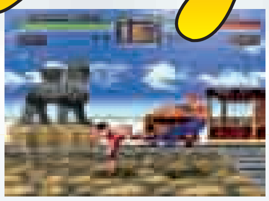
THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT

All your top fighting franchises have, at some point, got all kiddified and cutesy on our ass. Whether it is the gem grabbing cartoon lunacy of *Pocket Fighter*, SNK stalwarts shrinking to fit the NGPC, or WonderSwan fans enjoying *Guilty Gear Petit*, fans lap it up. And *Virtua Fighter* hopped onto the bandwagon in 1996 with *Virtua Fighter Kids*, a super-deformed dust up with wee little anime fellas, wacky CGI sequences, programmable combos and a speeded up twist on the Saturn *VF2* engine. It was ported Saturn-wards, and is thoroughly recommended. GameCube and PS2 fans have also had a child-flavoured helping of *VF*-lite with the RPG-tinged *Virtua Quest*, a below par action title that had a decent combat system but was poorly realised. Amazing really, when you consider that the working title for *Shenmue* was "Virtua Fighter RPG" – we're glad it didn't turn out like that. *VF* fans can also find some of their fave characters appearing in the EyeToy jaunt, *Sega Superstars*.



THE STORY OF Virtua Fighter





OUT OF THE ARCADE

Back in the day, arcade hardware was always more powerful than most home platforms, which is why we had terms like "arcade perfect" and drooled over decent ports. As we know, some platforms just couldn't handle some arcade ports properly, so you had square pegs not forced but moulded to fit into round holes. Cases in point, the Sega Master System and Game Gear *VF* titles – *Virtua Fighter Animation,* and the Sega Genesis/Mega Drive version of *Virtua Fighter 2* (all released in 1996). The 3D trickery was impossible on any of the three consoles so (extremely competent) 2D one-on-one scraps were the order of the day, the former two interspersed with anime-style cutscenes. The MS release was Brazil only, and it may be tricky to tack the GG cart down. But try the Mega Drive version on the recently released PS2/PSP collection – it may surprise you!



» It looked insanely cute, but the gameplay of *Virtua Fighter Kids* was as deep as ever.

» Battle of the old fogies, there can be only one winner here. Can you guess who it's going to be?

a-combo" malarkey in *VF* that deducts tons of energy with nothing you can do about it. It feels like a true contest as opposed to times in *Tekken* where it's seemingly more of a Simon-esque memory game as players dole out their respective ten-hit combos. Both games toy with realism to varying degrees – I think *VF* gets away with it, whereas the explosions, angels, devils and other supernatural phenomena work to *Tekken*'s detriment in its standing as a pure fighting experience."

The game impressed not only the critics, but also the games-playing public, who flocked to the arcades in their droves. The gameplay consisted of the standard beat-'em-up best-of-three formula, with characters moving and sidestepping their way around the 3D environments, whilst having access to a dizzying amount of moves. Attacks and holds could be carried out not only when standing face-to-face with your foe, but also when they were prone on the deck. A victory could also be achieved by way of a "ring out" – basically throwing or beating your nemesis outside the confines of the battle arena. The characters themselves were expertly realised, and included nimble master of Nijitsu Kage-Maru, totty Sarah Bryant and her pretty boy race car driver brother Jacky, and Aussie fisherman-turned mentalist Jeffry McWild – the latter incidentally still Retro Gamer's favourite-named beat-'em-up character ever. In true fighting tourney tradition there was an evil boss character, who would return over the course of the series. Dural – a cyborg bio-weapon created by the sinister Judgement6 Corporation, somewhat unnecessarily in the image of Kage-Maru's mother – was suitably sinister and deadly in the right hands.

The combatant's attacks were drawn from real techniques such as pancrase, pro wrestling, jeet-kune-do and bajiquan and as a result each was completely different. The moves looked genuinely nasty, and over the course of a bout you could twist your opponent in knots, beat them with precision-aimed kicks and jabs, and generally throw them around with a brutality akin to Naomi Campbell disciplining her housekeeper.

Series figurehead Akira was and still is very much the main man, his fizzog being as instantly recognisable to games fans as Ryu and Ken, Kazuya or Terry Bogard. "We checked Kenji as one of the influences for (Akira's fighting technique) Hakkyoku-Ken", says Murayama, referring to the seminal Japanese Manga series that the designers partially based him on. And speak to any *VF*-o-phile, such as a certain Mr Leadbetter – and Akira remains a firm favourite, even all these years on: "Akira is my favourite character, and I suspect he's the developers' favourite too. The more you put into learning how to use him, the more spectacular the results you get. I first realised what a work of genius *Virtua Fighter 2* was when I imported a Japanese gameplay video based solely on winning with Akira. I saw the full potential of that game just through watching Akira in the hands of a true master. All the core writers at EMAP at the time gathered around to

> "THE MEAN MACHINES, SEGA MAGAZINE AND C+VG STAFF ALL BECAME COMPLETELY ADDICTED TO VIRTUA FIGHTER BATTLES" RICHARD LEADBETTER



» A Virtua Fighter 2 cabinet in all its glory. It's been a long time since we played on one.



» In skilled hands, Akira is the character that just keeps on giving and giving.



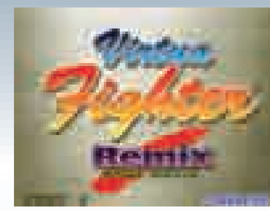
» Don't be fooled by the simplistic look, the fighting itself is unmatched.

watch that video – it was like seeing a completely different game compared to the experience we were having. And it made us all want to be better players."

The infant Sega Saturn was always going to receive a conversion of *Virtua Fighter*, and true to form it was available as a launch title in November 1994. A "killer app" if ever there was one, it no doubt helped Sega shift a hell of a lot of machines, even with the PlayStation and *Tekken* on the very near horizon. The conversion, whilst not arcade-perfect, was still highly impressive and it was unimaginable that anything as complex could be accomplished on the still-popular 16-bit hardware of the time. Richard Leadbetter recalls the shenanigans in his offices when Sega "dropped the bomb", so to speak: "At the EMAP offices, the Saturn and the PlayStation arrived within a month of each other. While *Ridge Racer* truly was spectacular, the Mean Machines, Sega Magazine and C+VG staff all became completely addicted to *Virtua Fighter* battles, with numerous grandiose wagers being placed before each bout. At one point, Tom Guise bet his immortal soul on a Jacky vs Sarah bout against me. Which he lost. Miserably."

The success of *Virtua Fighter* meant that a sequel was inevitable, particularly when Namco and sundry other challengers began to develop their own rival titles. *Virtua Fighter 2* arrived in the arcades in 1994, and was bigger, better, and infinitely more impressive than its predecessor. Sega's Model 2 arcade hardware was used for the sophomore effort, meaning it was flat shading begone and a big hello to spanking new texture-mapped polygons, with those bad boys hurtling about at a staggering 60 of the Queen's frames per second. New characters Shun Di (elderly sage, hobby as listed in manual: "drinking") and Lion Rafale (French, shady arms-dealing past, gets busy praying mantis-style) fitted right in with the World Fighting Tournament backdrop. Players were given even more moves to play with. The whole package just oozed the sort of class one would have demanded from a Sega coin op of the time. It was a virtual glove slap in the face to any would-be challengers in the 3D beat-'em-up bun-fight.

If you ask any true *VF* fanboy, even with the abundance of super powered consoles of today and their new fangled *Virtua Fighter 5*, Retro Gamer bets a whole five pounds that they would still say the second iteration is their fave. We asked *VF* fanboy Rich Leadbetter: "My heart really belongs to *Virtua Fighter 2*," he told us, visibly welling up, "*Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution* is probably the best iteration of the game I've played,



» *Virtua Fighter Remix* was just what the fans ordered.



» A S-TV cartridge of *Virtua Fighter Kids*. Don't expect to buy it for under £50.

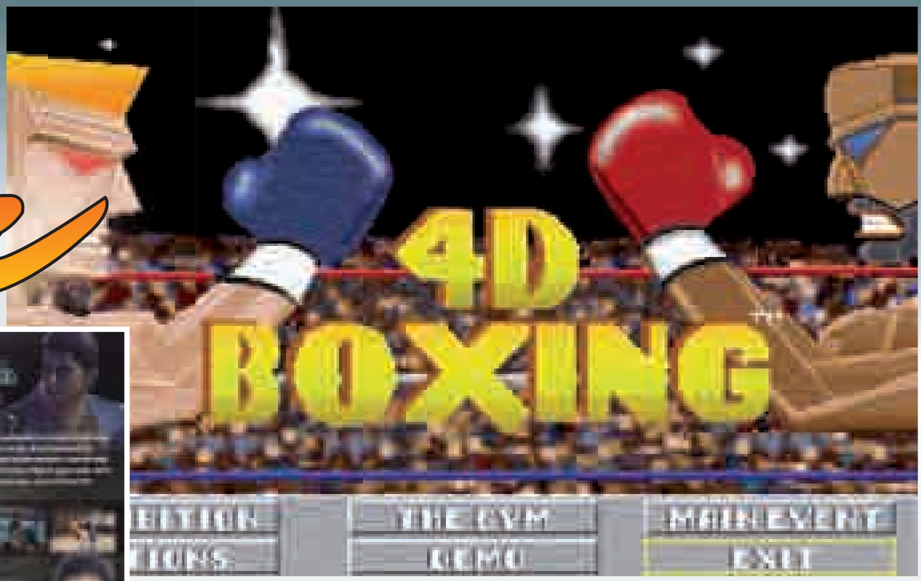


» Get past the less than impressive visuals, and this Dreamcast game proved to be a hell of a lot of fun.

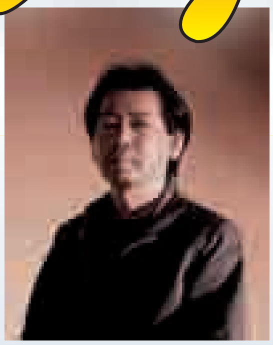


» *Virtua Fighter 5:* The best just got a whole lot better.

THE STORY OF *Virtua Fighter*



» *4D Boxing* may have been first, but we know what we'd rather play.



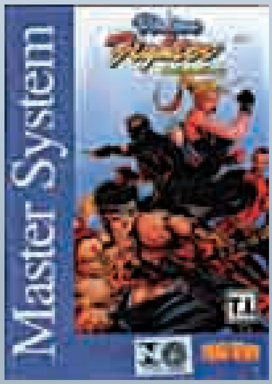
» Yu Suzuki - creater of *OutRun*, *After Burner* and *Virtua Fighter*. Bow before him.



» Advertising campaign for *Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution* on the PlayStation2.



» Rich Leadbetter is a huge fan of the *Virtua Fighter* series and was only to happy for a chat about the stunning franchise.



» You're going to have to travel a long way to get this beauty. Brazil in fact.



» A 3D fighting game starring Sonic the Hedgehog? You'd better believe it.

and *Virtua Fighter 3* is the most visually sumptuous in my book. But *Virtua Fighter 2* – it took the core brilliance of the original game and improved it spectacularly in every single way – the leap from 30fps to 60fps, the texture-mapping, the complete revolution in the control system. It was truly the golden era of Sega's arcade development."

Despite some circles crowing that it couldn't be done, the game received a stunning Saturn conversion in 1995. There were notorious "issues" around 3D when developing for the machine, but the programmers pushed the hardware and it remains a crowning achievement, alongside *Sega Rally* and *Burning Rangers*, on a platform that even now is dismissed as being capable of adequate results only in 2D. It was a massive hit not only in the rabid Japanese market, but right around the gaming globe. It became the biggest selling title of all time for the system, which is testament to the quality of the port. The Saturn *Virtua Fighter 2* also featured an interesting foible, in that the size of the fighting arena could be adjusted to as large or as small as your heart desired. Coupled in with an option to award infinite health, it was possible to shrink the playing field down to a minimum, make both players immortal, and then construct a tense bout reminiscent of sumo, as your only option becomes trying to "ring out" your nemesis. This may sound ridiculous, but we would urge you to try it. It really is a lot of fun, and a winning little Easter egg of sorts in an already banging game.

As true sequels go, that was Sega's lot for the time being. 1995 saw the release of a couple of tweaked pseudo-sequels, however. *Virtua Fighter Remix* took the first game and gave it a Model 2 lick of paint and some extra moves. Converted to the Saturn, it was given away free in the mail to all lucky console owners in the United States. *Virtua Fighter 2.1* was a Japan-only arcade revision that featured slightly more balanced gameplay, minor cosmetic enhancements and the ability to play with a redesigned Dural. Over the same time period, Sega also converted the first *VF* title to its ailing, unnecessary 32X add-on. It was a fine conversion nonetheless. Those choosing to shun the console world or the actual arcades could also enjoy their own *VF* fix in Windows form, as the first two titles were produced in 1996 and 1997 respectively. They can now been picked up for chump change in PC World bargain buckets the world over, and a law was passed recently forbidding Cash Converters franchises from trading unless there is at least one dog-eared PC *VF* in a display cabinet somewhere. Saturn fans also had the strange "CG Portrait" series, a separate CD for each *VF* character showing movesets and poses. Collecting proof of purchase for all of these meant you could redeem them for an exclusive Dural CG CD. Collectors now redeem their mortal souls instead.

"The New Standard", screamed the blurb on advertisements for 1996 sequel *Virtua Fighter 3*. And by God, here was the launch title for Sega's new Model 3 hardware, a complete revision of the franchise with two more new faces, stunning new graphics that included undulating surfaces, incredible new muscle rippling, eyes-a-moving animations, and for the first time in the series… a fourth button. This addition was the "dodge" function, the ability to "sidestep" attacks and counter accordingly. Initially fans were up in arms over this virtual heresy on Sega's part, but the depth it added to gameplay meant that it soon became accepted and part and parcel of this particular *VF* experience. And whilst it did not return in such simple fashion in the subsequent sequels, it is a feature that has cropped up in many 3D fighting games since.

The third true *VF* kicked *Tekken 2*'s ass in the Nippon arcades, yet it soon became apparent that despite a confident announcement to the contrary, the Saturn was not going to be able to handle a



» *Sega SuperStars* allowed you to beat up Akira in the privacy of your own home. Nice.



» More Akira Vs Pai action.

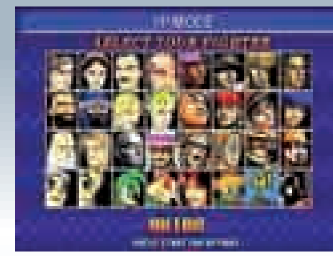
"PS3 VF5 IS ON THE WAY TO ME NOW. I KNOW I'M GOING TO LIKE IT, BUT MY CONCERN IS THAT IT'S ALMOST CERTAINLY GOING TO BE ANOTHER ITERATION OF VF2." RICHARD LEADBETTER



» **Above :** Akira and Pai face off in *Virtua Fighter 4*

» **Below :** *Virtua Fighter 5* is Sega's latest contender and it's awesome.





» *Megamix* was a superb bundle that featured lots of classic Sega characters fighting each other.



» Even the Mega Drive has a Virtua Fighter. Shame it's naff.

conversion without cutting the game down dramatically or somehow incorporating or releasing a hardware add on or enhancement chip. And thus, Sega began to shift its home console market-share attention to the forthcoming Dreamcast. In the same manner as *Remix* and *2.1* had followed *VF2*, *VF3* was succeeded by *Virtua Fighter 3TB* (Team Battle), a 1997 arcade update featuring *King Of Fighters*-style team match-ups. And it was this incarnation of the game that was to become a 1998 launch title for the Dreamcast in Japan. It was wildly popular and plays well to this day – however it was not the conversion many were expecting. Critics claimed the game was rushed in an effort to meet launch dates, and in the Western territories it failed to make the console's 1999 debut line up. As a result *VF: TB* was eclipsed by the aesthetically superior, and all-round more impressive gameplay of *Soul Calibur*. Until only recently, these events signalled a near-death knell for the series in the West, as Namco dominated the home platforms with its *Soul Calibur* and *Tekken* sequels.

That did not deter Sega, however. *VF* was still big business in the Orient, and the fans demanded more.

In 2001 *Virtua Fighter 4* debuted on NAOMI 2 arcade hardware, and took the series a little closer to its roots. Gone were the undulating and somewhat random nature of the stages and the evil fourth button on the control panel, and back came the straight-up arenas prevalent in the first two games. The gameplay was a true progression from even *VF2*, with all manner of evasion and throw-escape techniques available, including the sabaki – a sneaky attack that also doubles as a reversal. With two new faces and one omission (it was felt Taka could not be done justice within the *VF4* system), *VF4* truly upped the ante. The genius 2002 PlayStation 2 port included the "kumite" mode, which allowed you to select and rename your favourite fighter who is then saved to memory card and used to progress through a series of missions; each battle is different to the last with set conditions, unlockable items available (such as new costumes) and points awarded to boost your ranking through the "Kyu" system (think of "dan" and you are halfway there, *Karate Kid* fans). Sega also took the step of using AI copied from top class, real-life Japanese tournament *VF* players when creating the computer opponents – a nice touch.

VF4 received the now customary arcade overhauls, with *VF4: Evolution* arriving in 2002, with two new fighters, improved graphics that were less rough around the edges, and some new and alternative backdrops. The 2003 PS2 port has an even-better take on the Kumite mode, with characters that are now fully customisable, and shipped in the US with an awesome *Virtua Fighter 10th Anniversary* disc, that included a never-before-seen hybrid game that mixed up the original *Virtua Fighter* with *VF4*. Essentially the definitive version of the original game with a whole bunch of new characters, it was also available as part of a (no doubt very expensive) boxset in Japan, yet only made it to Europe as a promotional item. We asked Murayama whether it may see the light of day out here, but he was very cagey about it: "With regards to the Japanese market, we distributed them as a gift when you pre-ordered *Virtua Fighter 5*." The PS2 Sega Ages series has also featured *Virtua Fighter 2*, but again this has been annoyingly limited to Japan only. The incredibly lucky, arcade mad Japanese were also lucky enough to receive the 2003 *Final Tuned*, which messed around with *VF4* even further, refining it to within an inch of its life, yet still creating euphoric scenes in arcades out East.

So here we are then – 2007 and with *Virtua Fighter 5* the flagship fighter for PS3, and soon to be the first decent fighter on the 360 (*Street Fighter 2* on Xbox Live Arcade doesn't count, so there). It looks and plays magnificently, and has been wowing fans in the arcades since July 2006. *Virtua Fighter 5* is like a turbocharged *VF: Evo*, and features some excellent new additions to the roster, such as the Rey Mysterio-influenced El Blaze. The main issue with most gamers, and indeed Retro Gamer, is that it does not represent that big a step up from its predecessors. But there is hope. Read this article again – there hasn't actually been a bad *VF* instalment, and things can only really get better as long as the fans, like the always enthusiastic Rich Leadbetter, keep wishing: "PS3 *VF5* is on the way to me now. I know I'm going to like it, but my concern is that it's almost certainly going to be another iteration of *VF2*. I'm really disappointed that we've seen no key innovations in the game since *VF2*. AM2 should be looking at the martial arts movies (*Once Upon a Time in China* or even *The Matrix* would be a good start) and realise that martial arts isn't about set techniques being executed in exactly the same way all the time. We now have the power to be able to mathematically calculate how the human body moves – I want to be able to move from technique to technique when I want, how I want rather than wait for frames of animation before I'm free to make a new move. I don't care about graphical improvements. I want to see the pioneering spirit that made *VF2* ten times the game that the original *Virtua Fighter* was!"

Damn straight.

INTO THE NEXT GENERATION

Murayama and co are obviously proud of their achievements in creating the *VF* franchise and are committed to taking it into the PS3/360 generation and beyond, all the while paying heed to the trends of the ever-evolving fighting game market: "We always concentrate all our energies into developing *VF* games; we feel proud of every title. We believe one reason why *VF* is widely supported and popular is that we are play as many fighting titles as possible and actively adopt the ones that can be used as references." In 1998 the series was also recognised by the American Smithsonian Institution in the field of Art and Entertainment, and indeed a set of *VF* arcade cabs can currently be found at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. Bit better than a few old dinosaur bones, eh? Murayama is well chuffed with this accolade: "We feel much honour that the game we had created was recognized like that."



» Virtua Fighter Kids: Quite possibly one of the cutest beat-'em-ups you'll ever play.

THE MAKING OF...



THANATOS

How do you follow up a commercial and critical hit like Turbo Esprit? Mike Richardson's answer was Thanatos, a game about dragons and death. Martyn Carroll resumes conversation with the Durell programmer and discovers the singular story behind one of the Spectrum's most memorable games





Mike Richardson's eyes light up when talk turns to *Thanatos*. *Turbo Esprit* may be his most technically accomplished game, and *Scuba Dive* is very popular with the fans (see the recent 'best Durell game' poll on www.worldofspectrum.org), but *Thanatos* is his pet favourite. "I really like *Thanatos*," he tells us, before lurching straight into a list of things he's fond of in the game. "I like dropping rocks on peasants; breathing fire; eating the maiden and watching the fire flask fill with her essence; the knight surprising the dragon when he lands to eat the maiden; the wild-cats taking on the dragon at the castle gates; the reflection of the moon in the water; the slightly erotic nature of a naked girl riding the dragon; the size of the dragon – he's enormous…"

He has trouble remembering much about developing *Turbo Esprit* but his memories of *Thanatos* are as vivid and colourful as the game itself. This is mainly because *Thanatos* was 100 per cent his idea rather than a concept handed to him by Durell boss Robert White. "*Combat Lynx* and *Turbo Esprit* were Robert's ideas," Mike reveals. "He was thinking about popular games from a marketing point of view, which is probably a good thing when you're trying to run a business. Personally I didn't know anything about marketing and felt it was beyond my understanding. I was more of a fantasist and scientist, if that's not contradictory. Most of the time I was in a world of my own and I really, really wanted to do a game with a dragon in it. So I went to Robert and the conversation went something like this:

Me: I want to do a game with a dragon in it.

Rob: Okay.

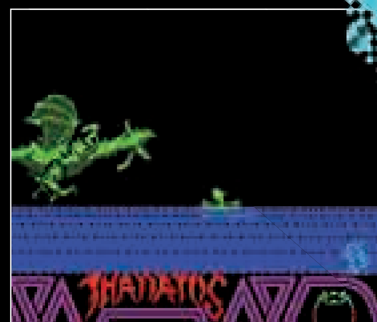
"And that was that. He had no concerns at all. His only contribution was the title. 'Thanatos' wasn't a word that I'd heard before. It means death, or dark force."

DRAGON'S LAIR

Although Mike started developing *Thanatos* in the summer of 1986, immediately after finishing work on *Turbo Esprit*, the initial idea twinkled into life when he first started out on the Spectrum. "I discovered a forgotten picture that I had sketched at the time I programmed *Jungle Trouble*. It was of a flying dragon with little pin-men underneath armed with bows and arrows, so it had obviously been in my mind for quite a while."

The main inspiration, however, had been infused in his brain much earlier, when he first read *The Hobbit* as a thoroughly impressed 13-year-old. "The most obvious influence is the dragon Smaug from *The Hobbit*. I read the book in 1970 and have read it many times since. I was so enthralled by it I even named all of my goldfish after the dwarves. Thanatos is basically Smaug on the rampage." A few years later he became a big fan of prog-rockers Yes who used fantasy artist Roger Dean to design their grandiose album covers. "A lot of Roger's work has dragon influences and I used to have a dragon poster of his hanging in our living room. I even sneaked a small tribute to Roger Dean and Yes in *Thanatos*. In the background, one of the rocks on the horizon is clearly in the shape of the landscape in Roger's Pathways picture, used on Yes's Yessongs album."

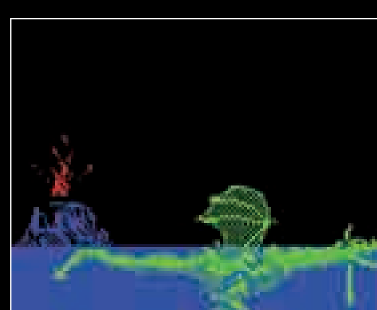
Before such subtleties were added, Mike had the not-so-small task of creating a bloody great dragon that would soar majestically around the screen. The result was one of the largest Speccy sprites seen this side of a Don Priestly game. "The dragon is composed of many animated sprite parts," he tells us, "with each sprite's frame having an X and Y offset to the next sprite in the chain. There's an animated sprite for the body, the leg, the foot, the neck, the head, the tongue, the wobbly turkey bit, two for the wing and two for the tail. I used the same sprite masking, drawing and



» The reflection of the moon shimmers in the water – just one of the little graphical touches that make *Thanatos* stand out.



» As Thanatos flies past the castle wall, note how the background colour of the sprite's character squares switch to try to counter the Spectrum's nasty colour clash ailment.



» The background objects weren't all just static scenery, as this lava-spitting volcano proves.

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** DURELL SOFTWARE

» **DEVELOPED BY:** IN-HOUSE

» **YEAR RELEASED:** 1986

» **GENRE:** ARCADE

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £2+



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SCUBA DIVE
SYSTEMS: SPECTRUM, CPC, C64
YEAR: 1983

TURBO ESPRIT
SYSTEMS: SPECTRUM, CPC, C64
YEAR: 1986

SABOTEUR 2
SYSTEMS: SPECTRUM, CPC, C64
YEAR: 1987

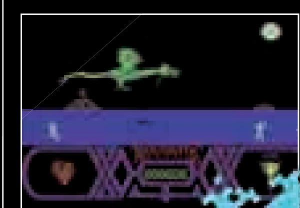


THE MAKING OF…
THANATOS

"I DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT MARKETING AND FELT IT WAS BEYOND MY UNDERSTANDING. MOST OF THE TIME I WAS IN A WORLD OF MY OWN AND I REALLY, REALLY WANTED TO DO A GAME WITH A DRAGON IN IT"
MIKE RICHARDSON

WROUGHT PORTS

When it comes to the best Spectrum software houses, Durell must surely make the list along with Ultimate, Ocean, Gremlin and Hewson. Yet over in Commodore 64 land, Durell is a dirty word despite many of the same games appearing on the two computers. The reason is simple – nearly all of Durell's output was developed on the Spectrum and then ported to the C64 and Amstrad CPC. The CPC ports were pretty good, due to it sharing the same processor as the Speccy, but the C64 was cursed with a series of quick and dirty conversions. The C64 version of *Thanatos* (below) was farmed out to a programmer named Rod Barrington, and while it was infinitely superior to the borderline offensive C64 version of *Turbo Esprit*, it's a distant relative (read: ugly cousin) of the original. It's really no wonder Zzap!64 liked to lay into Durell at every opportunity.





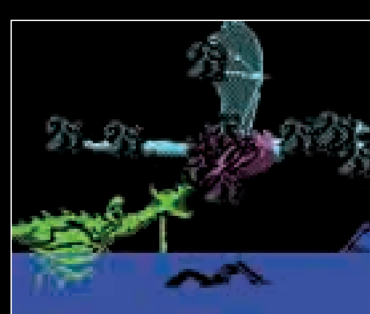
» The two-headed dragon in all its cyan glory. We're not entirely sure how Mike coaxed the Spectrum into staging such a heavyweight contest.

compression code that I had used in *Turbo Esprit*. This helped a lot. I was just coming around to the idea of re-useable code."

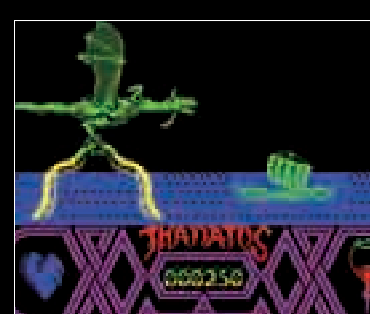
Something Mike couldn't recycle was the scrolling background. Whereas *Turbo Esprit* used 3D trickery to draw city streets, *Thanatos* viewed the action from the side with a parallax-scrolling effect giving the impression of depth and movement. As the dragon flaps along in the foreground, buildings and other scenery scroll by at different speeds in the background. It's a very convincing effect. "The scrolling was much simpler to do than in *Turbo Esprit*. I used a data table where each entry corresponded to a certain distance away from the camera – although I certainly wouldn't have used the word 'camera' at that time. The table entries contained things like the co-ordinate of the ground and a distance-scaling factor. I just guessed at these values and adjusted them if they didn't look right. I didn't know much about 3D maths back then," he laughs.

Mike adopted a similar trial and error approach to drawing graphics, and was always surprised at the favourable reactions to his visual work. "When people said to me how great they thought the graphics were in *Scuba Dive* I was amazed. I had never thought of myself as someone who could draw because, well, I can't. I used to think about graphics in the same way as electronics, where there were 40 pins on a chip for example and each pin could either be on or off, so there was a finite number of combinations. Similarly with Spectrum graphics you were working with a relatively small number of pixels. I would just keep turning them on and off to improve the look, and knew that there was a combination which would give the best result."

No amount of pixel manipulation could help, however, when it came to eliminating that age old problem of Speccy attribute clash, especially when colour is splashed around as liberally as it is in *Thanatos*. "My attitude to attribute clash was always: 'It's a Spectrum, what do you expect?!'. Basically you needed to be aware of attribute problems and minimise them as much as possible. For example, in *Thanatos* the ground is a certain number of character squares deep, and the back wall of the castle is one character square high. The area where I did put in a lot of effort in was with the castle walls. There is a lot of filling and foreground/background colour switching going on to try to minimise problems as the dragon walks through the gateway. It still looks horrid though, but there's only so much you can do."



» Going where no fox has gone before…



» Some of the bosses are enough to make you mess your y-fronts.

PLAN OF ACTION

As with all his 8-bit games, Mike never spent much time thrashing out the finer points of the gameplay. "I had an overall plan and fleshed it out as I went along," he says, "but the plan wasn't written down. I knew there was going to be a dragon, obviously, and he was going to fly along grabbing things and burning stuff. His fire would expire; he would become exhausted and needed to overcome obstacles. I can remember coming up with the heart rate monitor and flame flask at quite an early stage. I think the idea of carrying the sorceress on the dragon's back came next, and having to pass through a series of castles followed that. Other elements such as the water, serpents, caves, falling stalactites, and the two-headed dragon were all added as work progressed."

Ah, the two-headed dragon, surely one of the greatest boss fights ever seen on the Speccy. Having collected the sorceress from one castle, stopped off to pick up her magic spell book from another, you approach the



» The two-headed dragon was directly inspired by this piece of fantasy art by Boris Vallejo (Artwork copyright 2007 Boris Vallejo and Julie Bell – www.imaginistix.com)



» In one of the game's toughest sequences, you have to fly through the mutant spider cave without losing your passenger to the creepy crawlies. Spook!

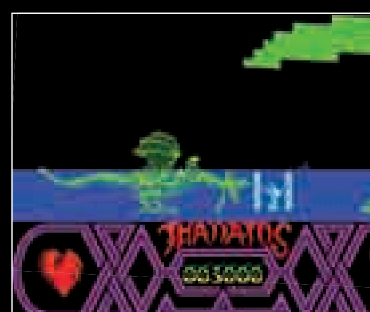
final castle with some trepidation. You've already dealt with a number of impressive nasties but nothing can prepare you for the Underworld's final salvo: a winged beast with two flame-equipped heads. Mike reveals the inspiration: "My first wife Jane bought me a copy of Boris Vallejo's book of erotic fantasy art Mirage. In it there's a picture of dragons being ridden by naked young women, known as Wraith Riders. One of the dragons is two-headed and that's where the idea came from."

TAKING FLIGHT

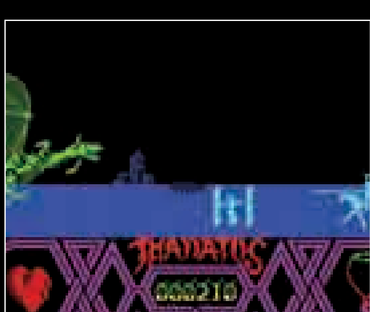
Thanatos debuted on the Spectrum just prior to Christmas 1986, taking roughly five months to develop. This was half the time it took to develop *Turbo Esprit*. "*Turbo Esprit* was a more complex project, and we had our first child to cope with during that one," he recalls. "I used to work from home most of the time and I remember a lot of nappy washing going on! It would have been during the development of *Thanatos* that our second child was born, but I think we were used to the trauma by then so it wasn't such a strain. One thing about Spectrum development was that once the memory had been filled, there wasn't much more that you could do. That used to be my cut-off point."

The game was praised across the board with it earning accolades from the two Spectrum mags that mattered, Crash and Your Sinclair. It was a deserved critical smash, but high scores did not translate into strong sales. "It was a commercial disaster, selling about 5,000 copies," says Durell boss Robert White, to our surprise. "This really confirmed my opinion at the time that the kids were copying our tapes and selling them to their mates. In contrast our first game *Harrier Attack* sold about 250,000 copies, but this was before the twin-tape Amstrad hi-fi hit the scene."

It was because of increased development time versus reduced sales that Durell decided to sell its gaming catalogue to Elite Systems in 1987 and move into business software. Mike is as surprised as we are to hear about the sales. "I had heard that sales were lower than expected but had no idea that they were that poor. Although the game has got its problems I always felt it was more sophisticated in terms of gameplay than the other games I had done. Also the game is really colourful and has lots of 2D animation. I don't know what the reasons could be for such poor sales." Perhaps piracy was to blame and thousands of kids were playing *Thanatos* on those 'try before you buy' C-90 tapes compiled on one of Amstrad's evil copying machines. Or maybe it's because original products were slowly being suffocated by the coin-op conversions and film/TV licences that were starting to dominate the market. Or more likely, *Thanatos* was just one of those doubtless classics that, for whatever reason, didn't jump out and grab gamers by the goolies. If it passed you by then grab the game and play it right now under emulation. It's sure to make your eyes light up just like Mike's.



» Watch the robot bouncers don't ask you for ID.

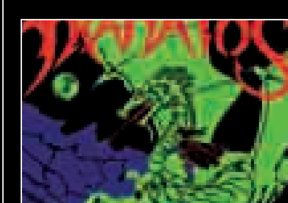


» This section is marginally easier than navigating Nottingham's one-way system.

"MY ATTITUDE TO ATTRIBUTE CLASH WAS ALWAYS: 'IT'S A SPECTRUM, WHAT DO YOU EXPECT?!'. BASICALLY YOU NEEDED TO BE AWARE OF ATTRIBUTE PROBLEMS AND MINIMISE THEM AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE" MIKE RICHARDSON

FAMILY AFFAIR

During development Mike enlisted help from his then wife Jane to contribute graphics to the game. "I really wanted to get her involved with what I was doing," he tells us. "She drew the loading screen, which was basically a copy of the sleeve artwork created by local artist Tim Hayward – Robert later gave the original artwork to her as a gift, and she has since passed it on to our son Ben. She also had some input on the background scenery, as well as the horse and knight, spider and wild-cat sprites." *Harrier Attack II*, Mike's latest project, is also a family affair with son Ben creating the graphics and 3D models, and brother Steve writing the soundtrack. For more information on *HAII* visit the website at: www.durellgames.co.uk.



» Jane Richardson used the original cover artwork to design the game's loading screen.

DESERT ISLAND DISKS

WHAT CHERISHED GAMES WOULD YOU TAKE TO THE ISLAND?



DATAFILE

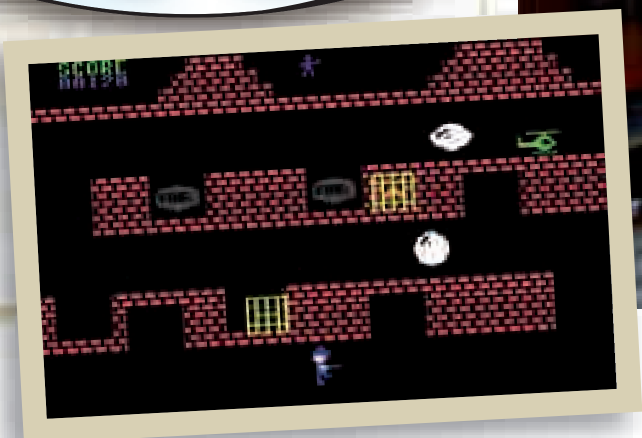
NAME: STE RUDDY

DATE OF BIRTH: 20/8/67

FIRST JOB: WIGAN IT CENTRE

CURRENTLY: LEAD PROGRAMMER, SWORDFISH STUDIOS MANCHESTER

FAVOURITE FILM: JAWS



» Ste's first published game, *Saboteur.*

STE RUDDY

HE CONVERTED SUCH ARCADE CLASSICS AS BUBBLE BOBBLE AND GHOULS 'N' GHOSTS TO RUN ON HUMBLE HOME COMPUTERS, HAD A KICK ABOUT WITH THE FIFA FRANCHISE AND RECENTLY BECAME A MADE MAN. PAUL DRURY ASKS STE RUDDY ABOUT HARD CODING AND EGG CHASING.

YOU MUST PLAY...

Bubble Bobble

An obvious choice perhaps, but that doesn't make it any less wonderful. It's the game Ste is most proud of too. "It's a fantastic arcade game and on the Commodore 64 it was a very interesting challenge that came out quite well", says Ste. Quite well is something of an understatement. He produced an incredibly faithful version of a major arcade title on a home computer and successfully maintained the game's timeless playability. All the more impressive when you know he had no access to the source code – he simply played it to death. As should you.



Ste Ruddy has a party trick. He can pour a quart into a pint pot. Back in the Eighties, he stretched the capacity of the Commodore 64 to accommodate *Bionic Commando,* managed to pop *Bubble Bobble* into the beige bread bin's limited memory and later would perform similar feats on the NES, converting Taito's scrolling shooter *Sky Shark* for Nintendo's first console.

Impressive achievements undoubtedly, yet we wonder whether Ste ever yearned for just a blank screen and the freedom to work on his own game idea from scratch?

"I've not thought about it really," muses Ste in his distinctive Wigan accent. "I don't know if I'd be motivated enough to start from nothing. I like a target, something to aim for. I much prefer to have direction."

It's a comment that starts to make sense when you discover his first completed programme was a version of Bruce Forsyth's *Play Your Cards Right.* Definitely not a good game, Ste assures us, but then that was knocked up in BASIC during post-lesson coding sessions on his school's PET. By the time he reached the fourth year, he'd mastered machine code and teamed up with schoolmate Mike Fielding to produce *Saboteur* for the Commodore 64.

"I'd go round after school and we'd type in data statements. We didn't have anything wacky like an assembler. We'd just tap in lines of numbers and calculate all the branches ourselves. Really low level stuff, I can tell yer."

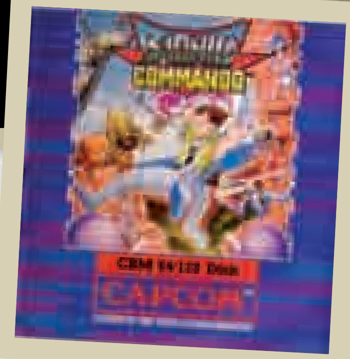
So Ste learned his trade at the hard code face, and whilst he describes *Saboteur* as 'not my proudest moment', the four screens worth of obstacle dodging were enough to attract the attention of Cable Software, who published his



» We like scrolling shooters at RG. Thus we like *Sky Shark* on the NES.







» **Left:** Enter WIGAN RLFC on the high score table and *Ghouls 'n' Ghosts* geta a tad easier…
Above: Ste can complete *Bionic Commando* without stretching himself. See what I did there?

game debut in 1984. It earned Ste a few quid – 30 to be precise – but more importantly it led him towards a career in coding. He attended college as part of Thatcher's much-loved Youth Training Scheme, ostensibly to study business programming, but having found the world of spreadsheets deathly dull, he put the BBC Micros at his disposal to more playful use. *The Big KO*, a boxing game featuring some magnificently moustached pugilists served as his calling card to the newly formed Software Creations. At this point, the Manchester based company consisted solely of founder Richard Kay, who offered young Ruddy a job and set him to work on converting *The Big KO* to the C64, before getting the title published through Tynesoft.

"I enjoy the techy challenge and I enjoy games," says Ste. "Becoming a games programmer is the ultimate combination of them both. I was very lucky."

"ARCADE CONVERSIONS CAN NEVER BE PERFECT. YOU HAVE TO FIGURE OUT WHAT YOU SEE AS THE ESSENCE OF THE GAME." STE RUDDY

You make your own luck my friend, though it does help when you're not handed turds to polish. Ste produced solid C64 conversions of Spectrum games *Mystery Of The Nile* and *Kinetik* but it was the big arcade projects he handled in the late Eighties that earned him the mantle of Commodore Conversion King. *Bubble Bobble*, *Bionic Commandos*, *L.E.D. Storm* and *Ghouls 'n' Ghosts* formed a quality quartet, but that only made the task of converting them to run on a 64K micro even more daunting.

"I see it as a re-interpretation rather than a conversion. You look at the game and do your version on the limited platform you've got. It can never be perfect. You have to figure out what you see as the essence of the game and get that across as well as you can. Is that frustrating? Yes to a certain extent, but it was just fantastic if you got anywhere close! It's like, do you see the glass half empty or half full…"

And the best way to distil the essence of a game was to play it to death. There's a reason Ste can now complete *Bionic Commando* in a single credit. "All we usually got was the arcade machine. The board arrived, we were told how much money and how long we had to do it and that was pretty much it. For the later ones, there was a test mode, which brought up the graphics and the artists could work from that and for *Bubble Bobble*, we actually got sent some design documents. In Japanese with no translation. Apart from that, we just played them an awful lot."

Though Ste was invariably the sole programmer for each conversion, it wasn't just a single-player game. Colleagues would be working on conversions for other home computers and as they crowded round the cab, each would be scribbling notes, sharing observations, comparing progress and spotting little details along the way. "I remember someone figured out if you popped the lightening bubbles in *Bubble Bobble*, the bolt would go the opposite way to the direction you were facing,' recalls Ste. "We'd thought it was random, but now we put that in. You ended up guessing what the rules were and you usually got it pretty much right."

The results bear testament to that. His 64 swansong *Ghouls 'n' Ghosts* (1989) was particularly impressive, benefiting from the use of multi-load and a marvellous soundtrack by Tim Follin. But consoles were now in the ascendancy and Ste turned his talents to the NES. Despite Nintendo's breezeblock sharing the same 6502 CPU as the C64, the transition wasn't as easy as one might imagine.

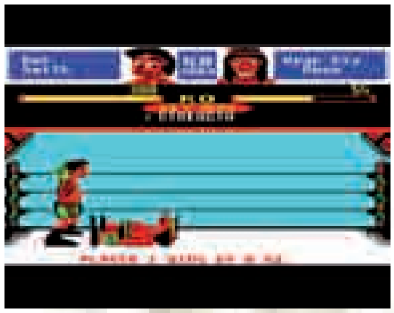
"It was a real revelation," he chuckles. "Going from 64K of RAM to the NES which had just 2K but a lot more cartridge space was a big difference. With the C64, you could do all these wacky things, like self-modding code, but you lose all that with a ROM cartridge. Once it's there, it's there! You had to count every byte. You had to be sneaky."

The sneakiness involved in NES development actually started before that. Nintendo wouldn't let just anyone develop for its machine so constructed its own Catch-22 situation: to be allowed to develop for the NES, you already had to be developing for the NES.

"It was this vicious circle," explains Ste. "Unless you could figure it out yourself, they wouldn't tell you about it. It was like a capability test. So Mike Webb, the co-owner of Software Creations, reversed engineered the NES. That original development system was a thing to behold. This board with a stack of RAM chips plugged into the 64 and you could program it through the user port. Then you'd unplug this stack of chips and plug them into the NES. It was a bit terrifying, as there was this big power adaptor right near where you picked them up, with 240 volts going through it. You tended to be very careful…"

Thankfully, Ste never got his fingers burnt and worked on a diverse range of NES titles. His contribution to each was varied – for *World Games*, he only grappled with the wrestling game, whilst he handled the whole conversion of Taito's *Target Renegade* and *Sky Shark* – but his proudest moment came when he was handed a big film licence. The clout of *Terminator 2* meant a bigger budget and better hardware (larger, controllable memory on the cartridge) and surprisingly, a relatively free rein.

"I seem to remember the only dictates we got from on high were that The Terminator had to be penalised for killing people once he was told not to, like in the film, and that Arnie would have final approval over any images of him that



» Ste punched above his weight and got *The Big KO* done on a YTS.

HELLO MOTO

While based in Seattle, Ste worked on *Moto-X* for the SNES, a bike racing game with big jumps and bone-crunching over-the-handlebar dismounts. "It was finished and approved for production by Nintendo," recalls Ste. "It was done as far as Software Creations was concerned but the company producing it, Trimark International, decided it wasn't for them. They were a Hollywood film company and maybe they were jumping on the bandwagon doing videogames. As production costs way more than development, I think they just got cold feet."
As far as he knows, Ste owns the only two copies in existence – one PAL and the other NTSC – but if you visit www.gamesthatwerent.com you'll be able to see what you missed out on, thanks to the ever thoughtful Frank Gasking.

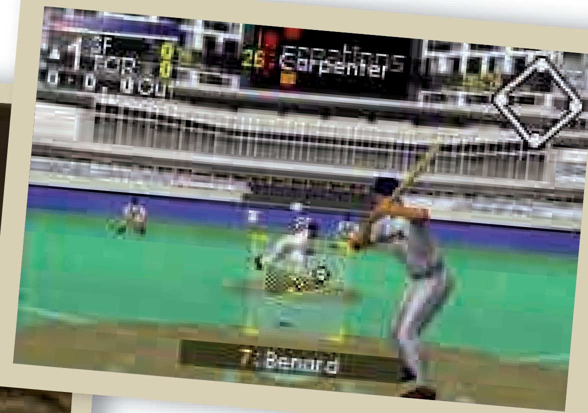


The sadly stalled *Moto-X* never got the chance to race *Excite Bike* for Nintendo bragging rights.

» **Below and Left:** Arnie approved his image for use in *Terminator 2*, despite it appearing more lifelike than himself. **Below:** Blood, guts and bare flesh. *Gladiator* was clearly influenced by a Saturday night in Wigan. **Below and Right:** *All Star Baseball 2003* on the GBA, one of several baseball games handled by Ste.

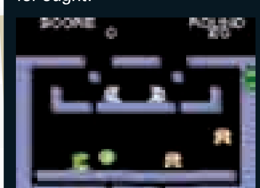






BUBBLE MEMORIES

In the aftermath of Acclaim's bankruptcy, Ste thought it wise to bolster his CV. "I was looking around and educating myself in Java and mobile gaming to see if it was a viable option. There's a lot of development in it and yeah, it is a bit like the old days – tight memory constraints and one person doing everything." Ste produced a couple of boxing games and *Darts Night* through Pieland Developments but one particular project made it all feel especially old skool. "Working on a version of *Bubble Bobble* for mobiles was very interesting. It was a demo to show what was possible on a low spec phone, which made it feel similar in terms of development – at least the memory squeeze – and strangely familiar considering it was almost 20 years since I last worked on the C64 version. The game actually turned out very similar, probably due to the fact I extracted the airflow data and baddie data from the Commodore game. And I did include all 100 screens! There are no plans to release it, although I play it on my phone whenever I'm waiting for ought!"



» *Bubble Bobble Mobile:* "I'm forever blowing bubbles, pretty bubbles on my phone."

appeared in the game. The film company supplied us with the original script, which I still have somewhere, original storyboard and various location stills. Apart from these, I don't remember hearing much more from them."

Published by Acclaim in 1991, the game signalled Ste's move up to the Super Nintendo. He worked on *Spiderman & The X-Men* and *Ken Griffey Jr Major League Baseball*, the latter with the Pickford Brothers, and its success helped cement the good relationship the Manchester developers had with the Big N. Software Creations decided to set up an office in Seattle, close to Nintendo HQ, and at Christmas 1994, Ste set sail across the pond.

"I ended up staying two years. It was a really nice place and the whole grunge thing was going on at the time. It was surrounded by National Parks and mountain ranges and I spent many a night camped in the woods, blind drunk."

In between starring in Sh*tfaced In Seattle, Ste did actually get some work done, coding the SNES versions of *Foreman For Real* and *Moto-X*, the latter sadly going unreleased (see boxout Hello Moto). Yet despite the familiar rain, Ste felt a little homesick. "I missed Wigan," he laments.

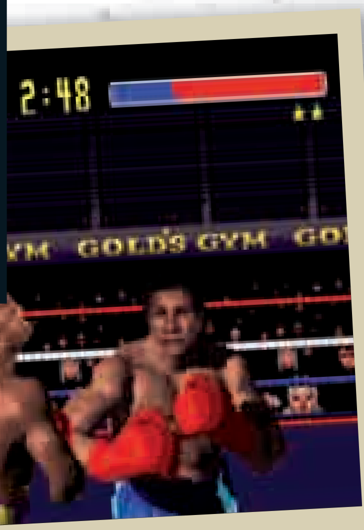
"FOR BUBBLE BOBBLE, WE ACTUALLY GOT SENT SOME DESIGN DOCUMENTS. IN JAPANESE WITH NO TRANSLATION."
STE RUDDY

He's not just referring to the town. His love for Wigan Rugby League Club saw him often fly home for key fixtures but ironically, when he returned for good, he spent the next decade working on games sporting the wrong shaped ball. Beginning with *FIFA World Cup '98*, he contributed to half a dozen versions of the famous footie franchise.

"*FIFA* is a big multi-headed beast, with offices all over the world. I'd be working on bits and bobs – the tech side of the N64 version or a mesh system to map images onto for the PlayStation. It was a collaborative effort but you could see your little bits and feel proud."

The new millennium saw big changes amongst the Manchester software houses, though. Having been employee number one, Ste was there when Software Creations finally closed its doors in 2002. He was swiftly recruited by Acclaim for its Manchester Studio and coded some enemy AI for the bloody *Gladiator: Sword Of Vengeance* and worked on a *Dave Mirra BMX* title and *Paris Dakar Rally 3*, before both projects floundered as Acclaim dissolved. His most recent release was last year's budget gangster game *Made Man* and now Ste finds himself with Swordfish Studios (creator of the very British and damn fine FPS *Cold Winter*), as lead programmer on an undisclosed 360 title.

"Nah, I can't say what it is, but it's looking very nice," comments the seasoned coder in true industry-speak. "I really like what I do, which is strange since I've been doing it for so long. I just love it when something works!"



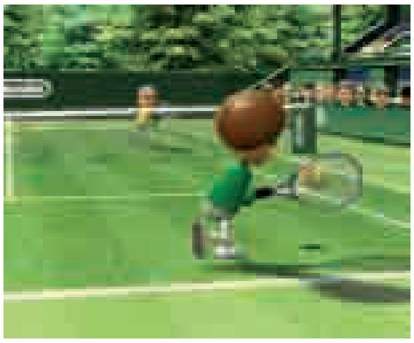




» **Far left:** *Foreman For Real*: 'You WILL buy my grill, fool' **Left:** The all-conquering *FIFA* series in its *'98* and *'99* incarnations. **Above:** *Spiderman & X-Men*, pictured in the infamous boyband level.



STE RUDDY DESERT ISLAND DISKS



WII SPORTS WII

1 The most fun ever with a remote control! In the context of Desert Island Disks it would benefit from some beach volley ball, but it's got to be said that tennis alone makes this a shoe in, though I also really enjoy the bowling far more than a grown man should.



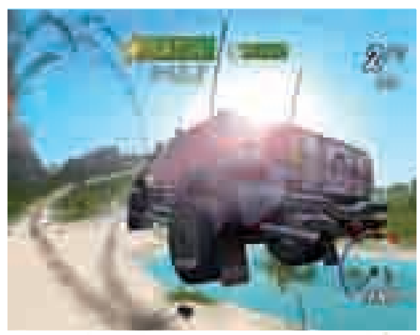
LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME NINTENDO 64

2 A stunning game in terms of immersion and developing game play. An absolute triumph of design, production, playability, narrative, err and everything else. I'm currently fighting the impulse to buy this on the Wii virtual console as I have the GameCube bonus disk that came with *Windwaker* already.



SUPER MARIO BROTHERS NES

3 Fantastically playable, this game amazed me when I first saw it and is still very much worth playing … so much so I have it installed as a Wii channel and bought the classic controller to have a good bash at it. Looking back I think this game really kicked off my console gaming habit and is a must on any island!



EXCITE TRUCK WII

4 Currently at the top of my games pile. It is fantastically playable and so much more controllable than I thought it would be. If it wasn't for this game I think *Mario Kart 64* would have been in the list. It really is a very tidy 'pick up and play' game.



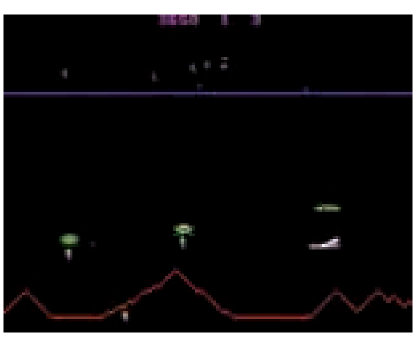
PIKMIN GAMECUBE

5 A fantastic game based on the wacky principle of controlling multi-coloured onions. Nuff said.



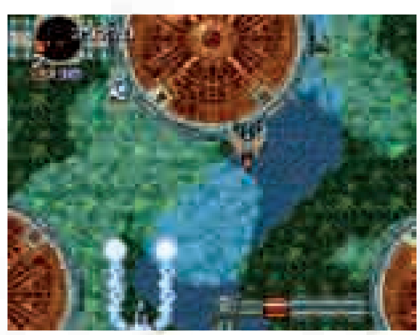
RC PRO AM NES

6 One of Rare's finest. It oozes high-speed intuitive gameplay with quality isometric graphics. Way back when I was playing this on an imported US NES, I didn't realise that Rare was a re-branded Ultimate, but I should have realised with the super high production values.



PLANETOID BBC MICRO

7 Perversely I prefer this version of *Defender* over the arcade original! The layout of the keys is still burned into the back of my brain. It has that fantastic *Defender* inertia that only shows up when being chased by a mutant and trying to rescue a captive at the same time.



SUPER ALESTE SNES

8 A vertically scrolling shooter that is a whole lot of fun to play. The game has the excellent array of weapons and wacky baddies that you'd expect from a quality shooter.

› STE RUDDY

MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE



Witchfinder: What arcade game would you liked to have done a conversion of for 8-bit machines (even if it was released after the 8-bit era)?
Ste: That's a very tricky question. In the arcades at the time I was a big fan of the host of shooters. I would have loved to have a go at any of the wonderful Taito shooters (other than *Sky Shark*/*Flying Shark* which I did have a go at and really enjoyed) or any of the *Gradius* series.

SirClive: Do you feel that you sold out by getting involved in the FIFA franchise?
Ste: No, I really enjoyed working on the *FIFA* games, apart from the long hours we had to work. Whilst on *FIFA*, I worked on the N64, Sony PlayStation, Windows PC, PS2, GameCube and Xbox, so there was always some interesting thing to do just around the corner. Of the *FIFA* projects I worked on, *FIFA '99* on the N64 was probably the most 'techy' and fun. *Euro 2000* was probably the most ambitious (complete new training system, tougher more 'European' AI, lots of crossing and headers, skill tutorial mode and pub play – quick tournament). Unfortunately it wasn't well received and so EA pulled *FIFA* back to what was familiar.

Utini: With the benefit of hindsight, which game would you have walked away from on day one?
Ste: None, I think. Fortunately I enjoy programming and playing games, which generally means whatever game I'm working on I find something to enjoy about it. In my time I have done a bit of fire fighting and even that I've quite enjoyed. The final few weeks of *Euro 2000* was a real pain – 16-hour days starting at 5:00pm! – but there was still enough about the project I enjoyed working on, such as the day-night stadium transitions, real world weather system, real (well on PSone, real ugly) face system, muddy kits and other bits and bobs.

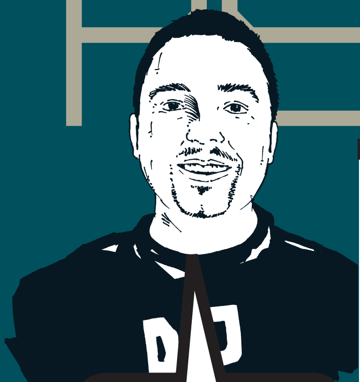
NorthWay: I've read you used software sprites in the C64 version. How did that come about and how did you manage to pull it off so beautifully?
Ste: All eight hardware sprites were used for the players and baddies meaning there really was no option but to do the bubbles as software sprites. A sprite multiplexor didn't really suit as *Bubble Bobble* tends to congregate all its sprites in one area of the screen and fortunately I'd had experience with software sprites on the BBC and my previous C64 games. The game was effectively multi-threaded with the player/baddies updating on a raster interrupt every two video frames and the bubbles updating/rendering every three video frames in the main loop.

NorthWay: Oh, and why is the C64 version missing the moving bubbles in the wonderful 'journey' screen?
Ste: Lack of memory. Towards the end of development I was having real problems running out of memory and not just game memory. I had to strip out a fair bit of stuff including the baddie in sprite animations and the game completion tune, which eventually survived as the introduction tune. After Mike Follin (programmer of the Speccy version) saw *Super Bubble Bobble* in an arcade, I added the introduction screen which used the bubble workspace memory before the game was running proper to change the game from *Bubble Bobble* to *Super Bubble Bobble* on a key press. Basically this just remaps the baddies on each level … so I bunged the game completion tune in this screen.

paranoid marvin: After such a great conversion of Bubble Bobble for C64, were you disappointed not to be given the opportunity to convert the sequel , Rainbow Islands?
Ste: Not really. I don't think I had time to be disappointed. I was working on the Software Creations music driver, starting on my next game and probably starting to look at the Nintendo NES console.

GetDexter: Do you regret never having written a game for the Amstrad?
Ste: I really fancied the original Amstrad CPC-464. It came out when I was still at school and if I could have afforded it who knows? Unfortunately, I seem to remember it suffering in the shadow of the Speccy, in the UK at least, but Ocean did do some quality games on it – I seem to remember *Renegade* looking gorgeous on the Amstrad.

RETRORATED

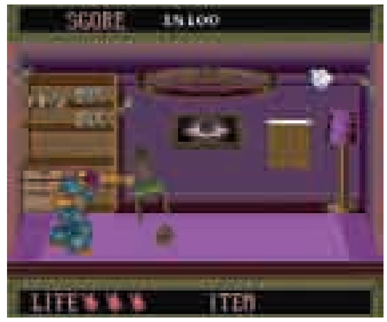


Another month, another batch of Virtual Console games to sink your teeth into. This month, there's something for everyone, from the two-player brutality of Streets Of Rage, to the platform antics of that pink blob Kirby. Just don't get too upset if you decide to download Ice Climber…

SPLATTERHOUSE

INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** NAMCO
- **MARKET POINTS COST:** 600
- **CONTROL METHODS:** REMOTE, GAMECUBE CONTROLLER, CLASSIC CONTROLLER
- **60 HZ:** YES



Another scrolling fighter, but where *Streets Of Rage* is starting to show its age, *Splatterhouse* remains as fresh as a still-beating heart that's just been ripped from someone's chest. Granted, the gameplay is far more simplistic, the weapons aren't as plentiful, there's no two-player option and the music is nowhere near as good, but we've had far more fun playing *Splatterhouse*. Maybe it's the gruesome visuals (which have admittedly been censored) or perhaps it's just that it's a good 200 points cheaper and features putrefied baby corpses hanging from ropes. Maybe based on that last comment we just need to get out more.

ICE CLIMBER

INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **MARKET POINTS COST:** 500
- **CONTROL METHODS:** REMOTE, GAMECUBE CONTROLLER, CLASSIC CONTROLLER
- **60 HZ:** NO

Normally, we tend to stay away from the whole 50/60Hz debate, but when a brilliant title like *Ice Climber* gets ruined, then we feel something must be said. Maybe we've been playing too many emulators, but the whole fun of *Ice Climber* was its joyous multiplayer mode that saw you and a friend trying to reach the top of a mountain as quickly as possible. Whilst this Pal version may have been perfectly serviceable back in 1986 it's now looking mighty tired, with the Eskimo protagonists seemingly running through thick, sticky treacle. Previously we've not found occasion to enter the 50Hz debate, but if *Ice Climber* starts to become the norm, then we may well have to rethink our current stance.



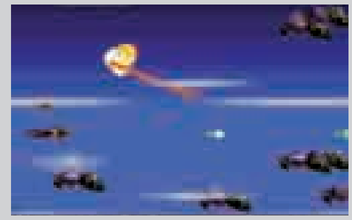
STREETS OF RAGE

INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **MARKET POINTS COST:** 800
- **CONTROL METHODS:** GAMECUBE CONTROLLER, CLASSIC CONTROLLER
- **60 HZ:** NO



***Streets Of Rage* was a fantastic title in its day.** Notice the important use of the WAS there. It may have been cutting edge back in the early Nineties, but Sega's once excellent brawler is now looking rather tired, mainly because of the two superior sequels that were released. Yuzo Koshiro's superb techno score still manages to entrance, but the limited moves, annoying special and rough looking visuals really dampen *Streets Of Rage*'s appeal. Fans will no doubt buy this regardless, but it's only going to be a matter of time before the sequels turn up, so you'd be better off waiting for those as they offer far more bang for your buck… er points.



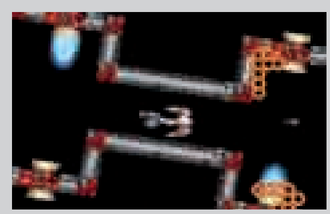
BIO-HAZARD BATTLE

INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **MARKET POINTS COST:** 800
- **CONTROL METHODS:** REMOTE, GAMECUBE CONTROLLER, CLASSIC CONTROLLER
- **60 HZ:** NO

With the likes of *R-Type, Soldier Blade* and *Super Star Soldier* already available on the Virtual Console, it's a brave company indeed that pushes utterly generic tosh like *Bio-Hazard Battle* into the fray.

Aside from its insectoid theme and eerily beautiful music, this utterly mundane shooter has very little going for it. Granted, there are four different fighters to choose from and the levels are fairly lengthy and feature hordes of enemies to mow down, but there are already far better shooters available, so you may as well save your points for one of those instead. Go on, you know it makes sense.



R-TYPE III

INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** IREM
- **MARKET POINTS COST:** 800
- **CONTROL METHODS:** GAMECUBE CONTROLLER, CLASSIC CONTROLLER
- **60 HZ:** NO

It's taking a fair while, but Nintendo is finally bolstering the Virtual Console's SNES library and *R-Type III* turns out to be another excellent addition. Originally exclusive to the SNES (although there has since been an atrocious GBA port that makes us cry) this is a massive improvement over *Super R-Type* and features less slowdown, plenty of clever use of Mode 7 and a selection of gigantic bosses to fight. Like all *R-Types*, it's going to take a fair while to complete, and it's tougher than the world's oldest pair of boots, but at least you're going to be getting your money's worth.

SUPER MARIO WORLD

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 800
» **CONTROL METHODS:** GAMECUBE CONTROLLER, CLASSIC CONTROLLER
» **60 HZ:** OPTIMISED 50HZ



We'd tell you that *Super Mario World* is the best platformer ever made but you already know, as page 61 proves. Still, if you've never had the opportunity to enjoy this amazing game – perhaps you've been living on a desert island, or maybe you've been brought up by Mountain Gorillas in the deepest jungles of Africa – now's the time to find out what all the fuss is about. Meticulously designed, and with an attention to detail that other platformers can only dream of, *Mario World* is without a shadow of a doubt one of Nintendo's finest hours and a welcome addition to the Virtual Console. Now where's *Link's Awakening*?

SUPER GHOULS 'N' GHOSTS

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 800
» **CONTROL METHODS:** REMOTE, GAMECUBE CONTROLLER, CLASSIC CONTROLLER
» **60 HZ:** OPTIMISED 50HZ



Good old Capcom, rather than release the admittedly superb Mega Drive conversion of ghoulish hit *Ghosts 'n' Goblins*, it's instead plumped for the far better SNES outing. Essentially an update of Capcom's original *Ghouls 'n' Ghosts* arcade game, the Super prefix is for the greatly enhanced visuals, copious amounts of Mode 7 effects, beautiful orchestral score and all new levels that Capcom decided to include. Yes it's damned hard, but it's also one of the greatest platformers on the SNES. The only thing that lets it down is that it's already available on a number of different compilations at a far cheaper price.

KIRBY'S ADVENTURE

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 500
» **CONTROL METHODS:** GAMECUBE CONTROLLER, CLASSIC CONTROLLER
» **60 HZ:** NO



You've got to feel sorry for *Kirby's Adventure*. It's an absolute powerhouse of a platformer, perhaps the best to appear on the NES after the mighty *Super Mario Bros* 3, but it certainly struggles on its 8-bit hardware. Nintendo crammed so much into *Kirby's Adventure* that certain sections of the game look like they're going to have a break down and slowdown horrifically in places. Nevertheless, if you can deal with this occasional slowdown – and no, it's not because it's 50HZ – you'll find a wonderfully deep platformer that easily justifies the current popularity of Kirby, even if it does highlight the vast difference between Nintendo and Microsoft's current attitudes to retro downloads.



SWORD OF VERMILLION

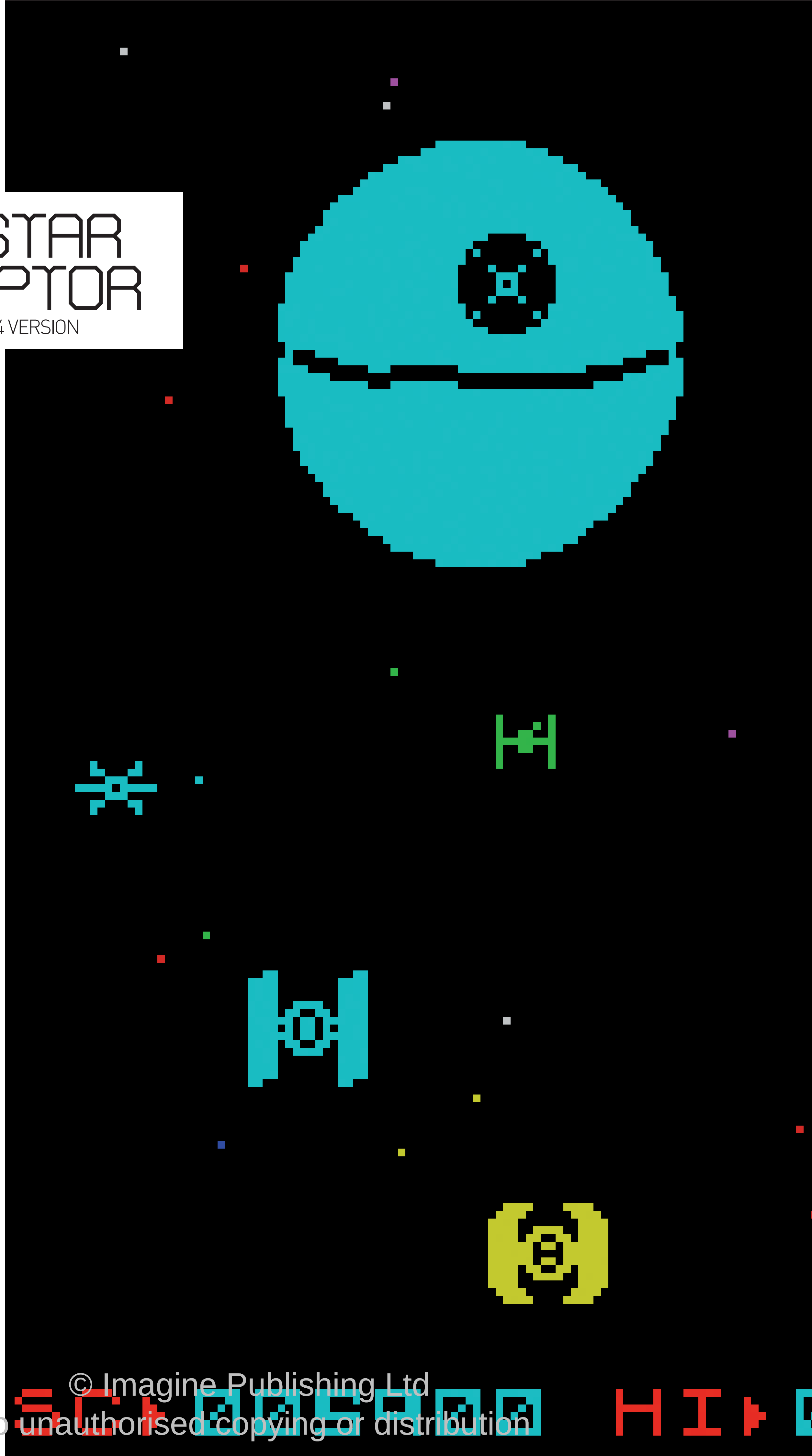
INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 800
» **CONTROL METHODS:** GAMECUBE CONTROLLER, CLASSIC CONTROLLER
» **60 HZ:** NO

Now here's a 'by the book' RPG if ever there was one. Despite being fairly enjoyable back in the day, *Sword Of Vermillion* now comes across as a tired plodding RPG that manages to tick all the right boxes but just doesn't really have what it takes to impress in a world of *Secret Of Manas*, *Chrono Triggers* and *Soleils*. The combat feels very messy and disjointed; constantly getting lost in dungeons because your torch has run out makes you want to scream like a banshee, while the once solid storyline now reveals itself to be utter tripe. Oh and the fact that it's already available for the equivalent of 60 odd pence as part of Sega's recent Mega Drive compilation finally seals its fate.

DEATH STAR INTERCEPTOR

MUCH BETTER THAN THE C64 VERSION





- **PUBLISHER:** SYSTEM 3 SOFTWARE
- **RELEASED:** 1985
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ZX SPECTRUM
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1

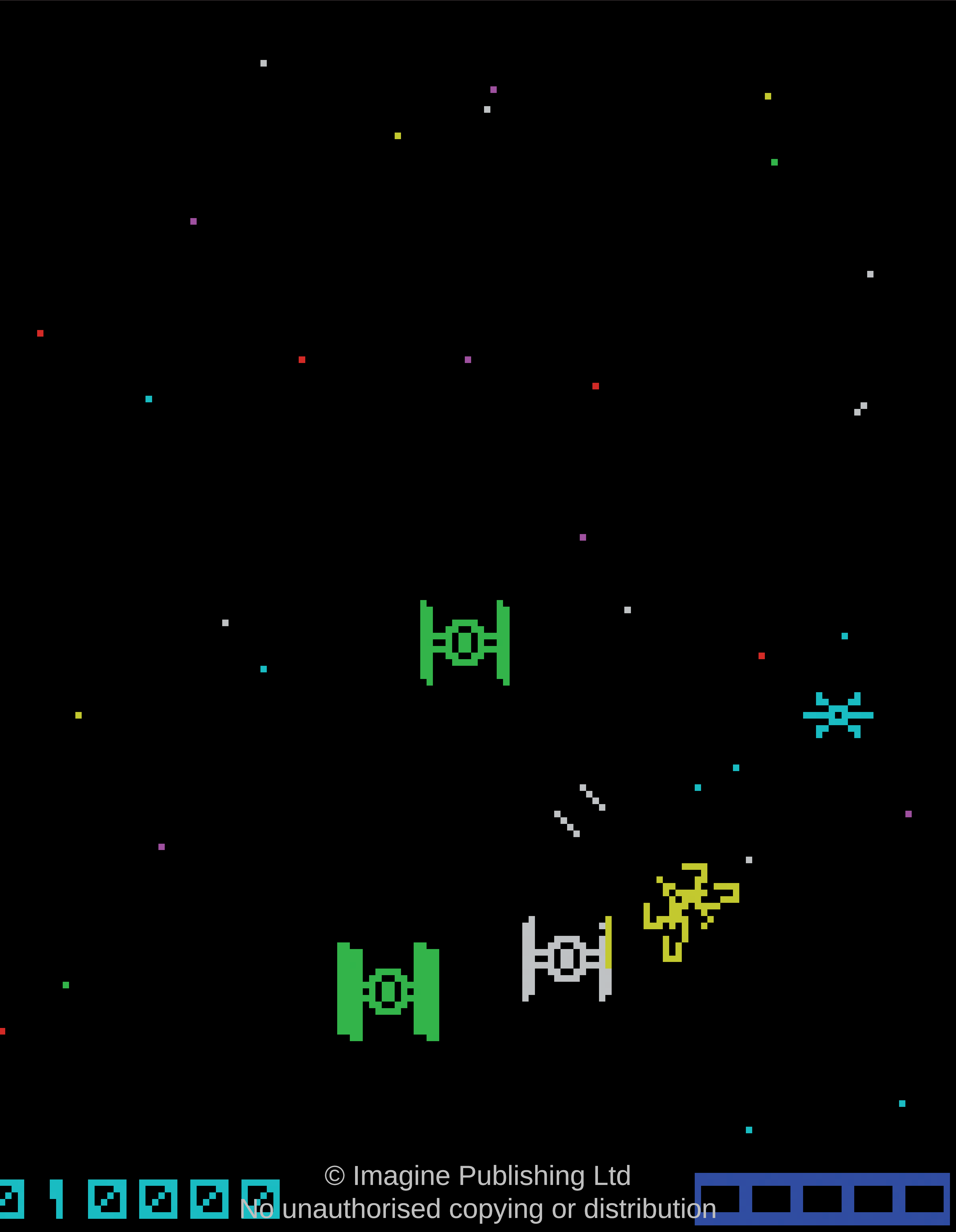


HISTORY

If there's a game that has a more infuriating intro than the opening level of *Death Star Interceptor*, then I haven't played it. Starting off on a runway, you had to guide your cute little X-Wing into a tiny dot in the centre of the screen, thus allowing your craft to make the leap to hyperspace. It was always amazingly frustrating back in the day and over the last 22 years it hasn't got any easier. Imagine trying to pick up an eel that's covered in Vaseline with a pair of novelty giant hands and you'll start to realise just how annoyingly difficult that first stage was, and indeed, still is. A pity really, as once it's out of the way Death Star Inceptor proved to be a great little shooter, and the definitive *Star Wars* experience (at least until the release of Domark's arcade conversion some two years later).

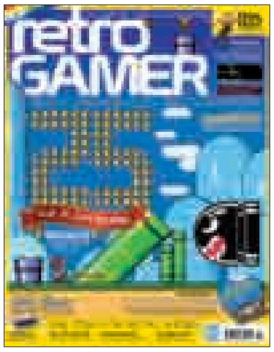
Interceptor's second stage saw you shooting down hordes of Tie-Fighters, and bizarrely, X-Wings, while the Death Star got ominously closer to you. It's a ridiculously hectic affair, with the Ties often flying back on screen, trying to catch you out and robbing you of a precious shield and it's so much fun that we'll forgive System 3 that the planet your X-Wing flies from is Earth and not Yavin IV. Reach the Death Star intact and you'd move to the final stage that replicated the film's trench run and saw you shouting "the force will be with you always," while your friend tried to wrestle the Kempston away from you. Once the "that's no moon, it's a space station," had been blown up the whole process would start all over again.

Returning to *Death Star Interceptor* after a 22 year hiatus reminds you of a far simpler time, when *Star Wars* licences could still be good, gameplay was more important than visuals, and occasionally, just occasionally mind, the Spectrum version was actually better than the C64 one.



THE RETRO FORUM

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – WWW.RETROGAMER.NET



CONTACT US

Snail Mail
Retro Gamer
Imagine Publishing
Richmond House
33 Richmond Hill
Bournemouth
Dorset
BH2 6EZ

Email
retrogamer@
imagine-publishing.co.uk

STAR LETTER!

CANDLELIGHT, CANDLE BRIGHT

Dear Retro Gamer,

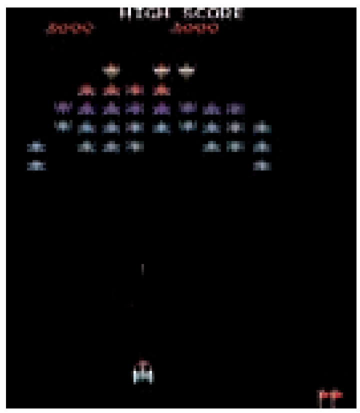
I just thought I'd drop you a line and tell you of something that made me both frown and smile recently. There was a power cut while I was blasting through *Galaga* on Xbox Live Arcade. I was annoyed as I was just about to hit my high score when everything went dark.

What caused me to frown was being pulled from my game so abruptly as I was 'in the zone' – being yanked from my focused point of attention was disorientating to say the least. Also, without power, I suddenly realised how the hobby we all share was so dependent on something we all take for granted.

So where does my previously mentioned 'smile' come into all of this? Well, I needed something to divert my attention from the plummeting temperatures due to the lack of heating, so I had no recourse but to light some candles I had miraculously found in my utility cupboard and read Retro Gamer by candlelight. You have to agree, reading a magazine about retro-technology by candlelight is a tad ironic. There were moments when I thought I was going to come across an article about a port of *Pong* for the Charles Babbage Difference Engine, but no such luck.

Keep up the great work guys,
Chris O'Regan via email

We feel your pain, Chris, we really do. There's nothing worse than a game failing you at a critical time; its happened to us more times than we can remember from read error BS to the batteries on our Game Boy running out during a critical multiplayer on Tetris. *You'd better console yourself with a new t-shirt and a spiffy Retro Gamer binder.*



» Chris apparently had a much higher score than this but he can't actually prove it.

I WAS WONDERING…

Dear Retro Gamer,

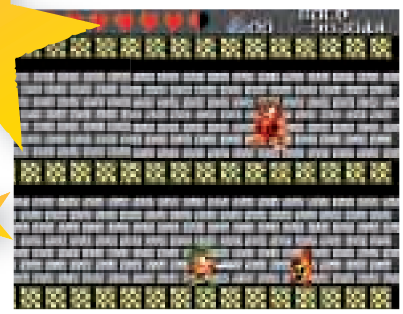
I was just wondering whether you might be able to identify a game that I have been after for a very long time. The game in question would have been for either the Sega Mega Drive or the Sega Genesis and would have been released in the late-Eighties or early-Nineties. It was an adventure game that saw you going into a special room where you would transform into different animals, one of which was a mouse that could run very fast and was also able to run up black-and-white chequered walls to reach tight spaces. I'm afraid I don't remember much else about the game so any help you could give would be greatly appreciated.

Thanks very much,
Dan S via email

What great timing. We're actually running a feature dedicated to the franchise in question this very issue. Anyway, the game you're looking for is Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap, *and the reason it's been proving so hard to find is because it came out on the Master System and not the Mega Drive. It's a truly great game that can now be picked up for under a fiver so seek it out as soon as possible.*



EVERY MONTH, ONE lucky reader will receive an extremely trendy Retro Gamer t-shirt (thankfully, not one that's already been worn by Darran) and a snazzy new Retro Gamer binder. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature. Failing that, something funny with swear words in will go down just as well…





» **Top:** We tried to get to the mouse, but we couldn't remember where the transformation room was. Still, here's some lovely chequered blocks.
» **Bottom:** *Panzer Dragoon Saga.* Quite simply one of the greatest RPGs ever made.

PANZER POWER

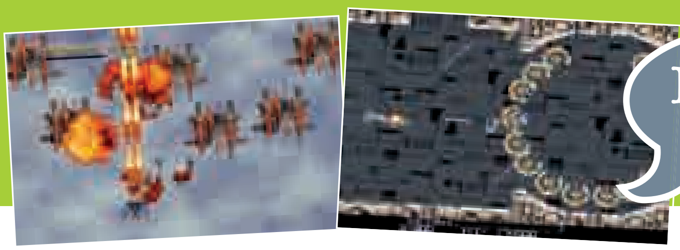
Hi guys,

I just wanted to say how much of a pleasure it was to read your *Panzer Dragoon Saga* piece that appeared in issue 34. I've been a huge fan of the *Dragoon* series since it's very first carnation, and have always held a torch for *Saga* and I just wanted to say that your piece was beautifully written, and did the game every ounce of the justice and recognition it deserves.

While this is one of the rarest games available in the UK for the Saturn, I truly believe it's a gaming experience anyone who calls them self a gamer should play, relish, and enjoy thoroughly. They just don't make them like this any more, and if every Little Johnny (who these days seem to believe that the latest edition of some big-name football game is the best thing on earth), played this game, then I honestly believe the gaming world could only become a better place for it.

DT, Kent

Glad you enjoyed the article, DT. We're huge fans of the Panzer Dragoon Saga *here at Retro Gamer Towers and are always asking Sega's Stefan McGarry when the next game's coming out. In fact, he's getting so annoyed with our calls that he's now got a new answer phone message that finishes with, "…and no, Darran, we're definitely not making a new* Panzer Dragoon *game so stop bothering me."*



FROM THE FORUM

EVERY MONTH, RETRO GAMER WILL BE ASKING A QUESTION ON THE FORUM AND PRINTING THE BEST REPLIES. THIS MONTH WE WANTED TO KNOW: WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE SHOOT-'EM-UP?

ID: The Master
Gorf. When I was a kid I had endless fun pretending to be a *Gorf* machine, hiding inside a huge cardboard box and saying, "INSERT… GOI-EEN" every time someone waggled my joystick. Er…

ID: LeeT
Nemesis (arcade version). Timeless and – despite the difficulty level – pure fun.

ID: Sabreman
Sorry to be a bore, but it's *Radiant Silvergun*. *R-Type* held the crown for about 17 years before this work of art found its way into my collection.

ID: Ninereeds
For me it has to be *Axelay*, top-notch graphics and a storming soundtrack, still playable even today.

ID: Dwayne Dibley
R360 (arcade). Forget the shooting; just do continuous barrel rolls until you vomit!

ID: Dudley
Tetris.

ID: Cafeman
Saturn *Radiant Silvergun* and *Darius Gaiden* are favourites, but my all-time favourite – simple as it is – would have to be *River Raid*.

ID: Browncat
Dodonpachi. A real bullet dodger with some of the best explosions ever.

ID: Monkey puzzle
Wizball (C64). Totally bizarre, incredibly addictive, and still just as playable to this day.

ID: Elspuddy
R-Type because it's the only one I can remember for CPC464.

ID: Beesty
Galaxian. It was the first full-colour arcade game I played and I just loved the blinking star background, with awesome gameplay to top things off.

ID: Jayextee
R-Type. The entire series, with the exception of the second, which was designed to inflict pain on the user.

WHERE'S THE LOVE?

Greetings Retro Gamer,
I have been collecting games all my life and my fondest memories are from spending time in the arcades between the Eighties and mid-Nineties. I have been very happy with your publication and look forward to every new issue, however, I have been meaning to ask – no beg – you PLEASE give the Neo Geo a cover story. The Neo Geo AES is my favourite gaming device of all time, and I have paid a premium for high-quality traditional games on both AES and MVS formats. There is no arcade hardware, nor home console that has been supported as long as Neo Geo, and it's pure retro gold. I would also like to see more features on arcade greats such as *Irem* and *Kaneko*; like your article on Data East.

Kevin Burns

Don't worry, Kevin, as you're not the only person who has been asking us for a Neo Geo retroinspection. But before we put one together, you may want to start with the three-part SNK Company Profile that starts in the very next issue.

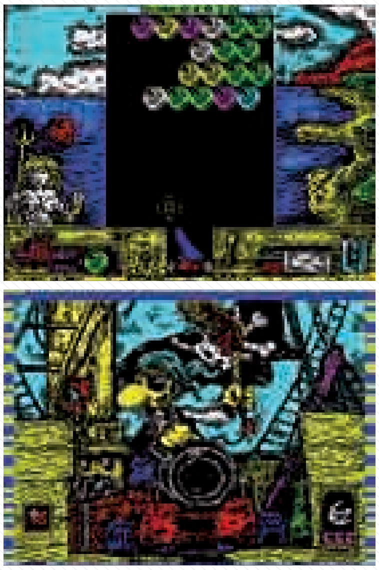
CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset BH2 6EZ **Email:** retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

RETRO SCENE

BUBBLICIOUS

NEW SPECTRUM TITLE LETS YOU POP TILL YOU DROP



» *Cannon Bubble*, it's basically *Bust-A-Move* on the ZX Spectrum. With pirates!

The Spectrum scene is absolutely thriving at the moment, and it seems that not a month goes by when a new title isn't released for Sir Clive of Spectrum's wondrous 8-bit machine.

One of the latest games that we've been fooling around with is the delightful *Cannon Bubble*. This is a groovy little title and an interesting take on SNK's brilliant *Bust-A-Move* franchise, but with the added bonus that it features pirates. Created by the mysterious sounding Utopian, *Cannon Bubble* is currently available from the Computer Emuzone Games Studio and the best news is that won't cost you a penny to download. In our minds, this makes it an absolute bargain. Expect a detailed review in the next issue of Retro Gamer.

INVITATION ONLY

RETROVISION OPENS ITS DOORS FOR RETRO GAMER READERS



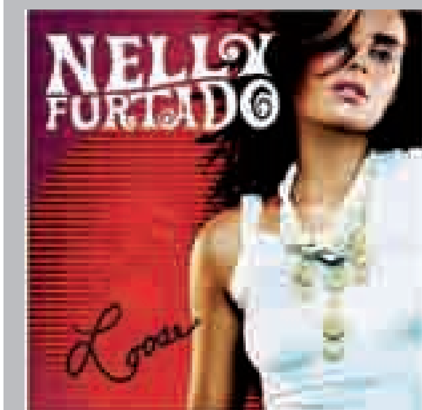
» Mark Rayson posing for the event that is Retrovision. Don't worry he doesn't really have green skin.

Mark Rayson is a very generous chap. Yes, he sometimes likes to dress up as Ming the Merciless (complete with green face paint) but there's no doubting his commitment to the retro scene, as this year's Retrovision event proves.

Taking place at Oxford's Port Mahon, Retrovision promises to be an excellent weekend that will feature plenty of competitions, the odd bevvy and celebrities like the legendary Jeff Minter. While this year's event isn't going to be open to the general public, Rayson has graciously agreed to allow Retro Gamer readers to attend the otherwise-exclusive event. Tickets are already available and will cost you £11 for the weekend, which starts Friday 11 May and ends two days later. Head on over to http://www.retrovision.org.uk/ for more information.

JUST DON'T DO IT

US PRODUCER STEALS FAMOUS DEMO



Followers of the Commodore 64 music scene will already know that a number of classic SID tunes have been stolen by chart artists, in order to make their compositions more interesting. And it's happened again.

The latest culprit is R&B producer Timbaland, who has stolen the SID rendition of *Acid Jazz Evening* for use on *Do It*, a track that features on Nelly Furtado's new album. The tune in question was originally created by Finnish demo musician Janne Suni, who ended up winning the Oldskool Music Competition with it.

What's particularly interesting about this is that Timbaland has already admitted to using the music in question without permission or payment. He also made the following comments in an MTV interview. "It makes me laugh. The part I don't understand, the dude is trying to act like I went to his house and took it from his computer. I don't know him from a can of paint. I'm 15 years deep. That's how you attack a king? You attack moi? Come on, man. You got to come correct. You the laughing stock. People are like, 'You can't be serious.'"

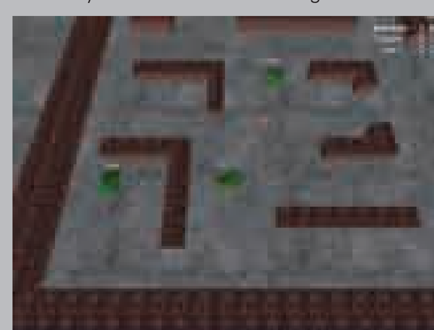
Needless to say, the above hasn't gone down very well with either Janne Suni or the Amiga and C64 demo scene, but at this time it's looking very unlikely that Suni has the money to take the matter any further.

TANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

COMBAT IS THE LATEST CLASSIC TO GET REMADE AND HEAD ONLINE

Now here's something worth keeping an eye on. It would appear that Retro Remake's Bankie is working on an online version of the classic Atari hit *Combat*, and it is already looking rather special.

Incredibly simple in concept – shoot your opponent before he does the same to you – *Combat* is nevertheless a bona fide classic and we're greatly looking forward to this excellent looking remake – if only so we can take the challenge online. While *Tanks Online*'s combat will be very similar to the 2600 original, Bankie is including several additions to spice up the action. Expect to see bullets rebound off walls, the ability to fire upto four bullets, and multiplayer support for up to four players. More news as and when we get it.



CLASSIC ADVERTS TO STIMULATE THE NOSTALGIA GLAND

THE GALLERY



» Burger Time UK – 1982



» Contra USA – 1987



» Double Dragon UK – 1989



» Thing Bounces Back UK – 1987



» Space Harrier UK – 1985



» Knight Lore UK – 1984

STELLA!!!

EVERYONE'S FAVOURITE ATARI 2600 EMULATOR GETS A MAKEOVER

It would appear as though the Stella team have been very busy bunnies over the last couple of months as the company's latest release contains a veritable deluge of fixes and additions.

Version 2.3.5 is an intermediate fix until the anticipated 2.4 version gets released later this year, but it nevertheless contains a slew of excellent features. As well as greatly improved cartridge bankswitch-type auto-detection and better emulation timing when changing ROMs, there's also a number of additional tweaks that ensure several games are now working properly. *Bumper Bash, Alpha Beam With Ernie* and *MagiCard* are just a few of the titles that are now available and are bound to please fans of the machine. Head on over to http://stella.sourceforge.net/ and grab that download now.

HEY, HEY 128K

JONATHAN CAULDWELL CELEBRATES 25 YEARS OF THE SPECTRUM WITH A FREE GAME

You have to hand it to prolific games programmer Jonathan Cauldwell: the man's a bloody genius, and seemingly appears to supply the Spectrum community with practically all of its greatest home-brew games. His latest offering, *Blizzard's Rift* is slightly different to many of his other games, mainly because it weighs in at a hefty 128K (*Amusement Park 4000*, by comparison, was a paltry 4K). It's a really neat shooter though and we'll review it next month.

IT'S A WHOLE PAGE OF SPECTRUM LOVE THIS MONTH AS WE LOOK AT PLATFORMER IZZY WIZZY AND PUZLER IRON SPHERE

IZZY WIZZY

"DIZZY AND WILLY KISSING IN THE TREE"

- » **FORMAT:** ZX SPECTRUM
- » **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW
- » **DEVELOPED BY:** JONATHAN CAULDWELL
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** CRONOSOFT
- » **PRICE:** 2.99
- » **REVIEWED BY:** DARRAN JONES



With *Egghead* so readily associated with talented Spectrum coder Jonathan Cauldwell, it's refreshing to see that his latest game brings one of his older (though no less loved) characters to the fore.

Izzy Wizzy is the latest adventure to feature Cauldwell's Izzy, and like many of his other games, it's a slick, polished title that cleverly blends genres and will keep you playing until you've discovered every last screen.

Forget the bonkers storyline that sees the Commodore fundamentalist mutants building a time machine so they can travel back to 1982 and prevent the launch of the ZX Spectrum and just concentrate on the sterling gameplay. Izzy now has limited spell-casting skills and is able to cast a variety of different spells with which to defeat his opponents. Unfortunately, he first has to gather the required ingredients that have been scattered across the castle's beautifully crafted levels, and with so many enemies to avoid, it's going to take all your platforming skills to collect them in one piece.

To further add to Izzy's task, a number of playing cards have been scattered throughout the huge castle. Izzy can either pick them up to fuel his magic gauge (needed to cast spells) or in typical Cauldwell fashion, he can gamble for more points by guessing if the next card turned will be higher or lower than what he already has. Finally, several bombs are also found in and around the castle and need defusing before they explode. Talk about not having it easy…



» So that's where all the C-5s ended up…

» Defusing bombs requires you to solve a relatively straightforward puzzle.



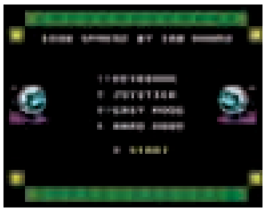
Overall, *Izzy Wizzy* is a polished little platformer that plays like a cross between *Dizzy* and *Jet Set Willy.* Colour clash is kept to the bare minimum, there's plenty to explore and the interesting game mechanics work a treat. Indeed, our only real niggle is the fact that certain sections of the game feature carelessly placed enemies that can quickly rob you of your precious health, other than that, Cauldwell and Cronosoft have another potential hit on their hands.

RATING: **85%**

IRON SPHERE

"KEEP ROLLING, ROLLING, ROLLING"

- » **FORMAT:** ZX SPECTRUM
- » **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW
- » **DEVELOPED BY:** IAN MUNRO
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** CRONOSOFT
- » **PRICE:** £2.99 CASSETTE £1.75 EMULATOR
- » **REVIEWED BY:** DARRAN JONES



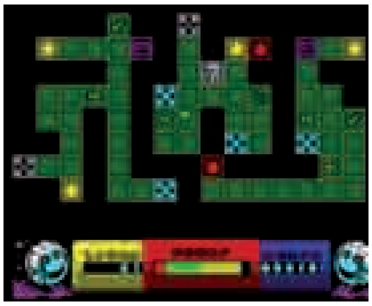
Chances are you've already heard of Ian Munro's *Iron Sphere* because it was originally released on the CPC 464. Back with a new ZX Spectrum conversion and once again published by Cronosoft, *Iron Sphere* is perfect proof that a game doesn't need to have amazing visuals in order to be a hell of a lot of fun.

In *Iron Sphere* you're required to do nothing more than trundle around in a tiny ball, and recover all the diamonds that have been scattered across the 100 mind-bending levels. While it sounds incredibly simple, Munro's devious mind has created a variety of different obstacles, indicated in-game as different tiles, to ensure that your task is far from easy. Bombs predictably explode should you move too close to them; arrows mean that your sphere can only travel in the indicated direction, while cracked tiles will crumble when you roll over them. Throw in teleporters, question marks that give out random results and some particularly narrow pathways to negotiate, not to mention a constantly depleting power supply and *Iron Sphere* will test your reflexes just as much as the old grey matter.

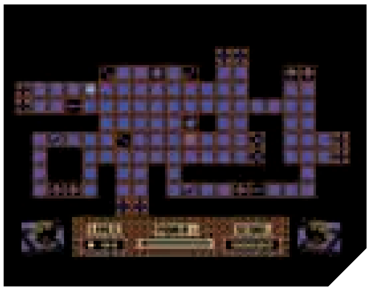


The conversion itself is rock solid and makes perfect use of the Spectrum's limited colour palette. Everything is easy to identify (crucial in a game of this type) there's a nice sense of urgency to proceedings and the collision detection is as tight as a drum. A worthy puzzler, a fine conversion and another jewel in Cronosoft's crown.

RATING: **80%**



» Those pink batteries replenish your dwindling power supply. That makes them very handy indeed.



» The Amstrad version (pictured above) is also available to buy from Cronosoft for the same price. Bargain.

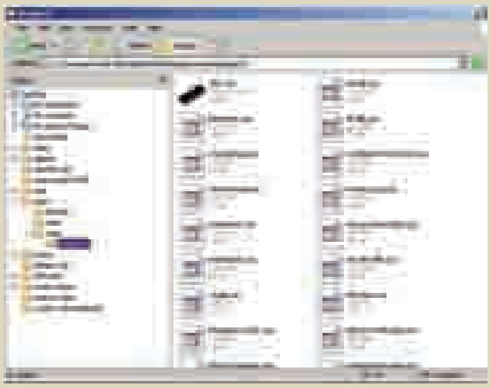
EMULATE THIS

THERE ARE SEVERAL DRAGON EMULATORS AVAILABLE FOR A VARIETY OF MODERN OPERATING SYSTEMS, BUT THE QUICKEST AND EASIEST OPTION IS THAT TRUSTY JACK-OF-ALL-TRADES, MESS. IN JUST EIGHT EASY STEPS YOU COULD BE PLAYING ALL MANNER OF CLASSIC DRAGON GAMES…



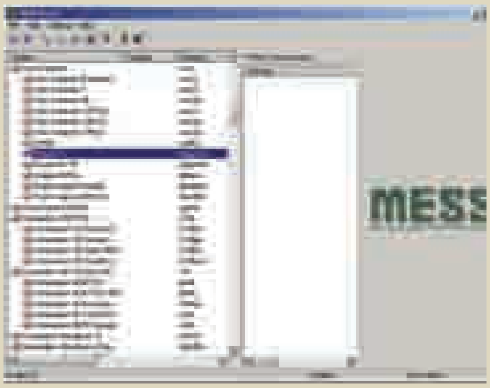
STEP ONE

Download the latest Windows version of MESS (Multiple Emulator Super System) from www.mess.org and extract the contents of the archive into an empty folder on a local drive. This will unpack several files and two folders, artwork and hash. Create a new folder and name it roms, and inside that create a sub-folder called dragon32. This is where you need to store the Dragon ROM file(s) and all the Dragon software you wish to run.



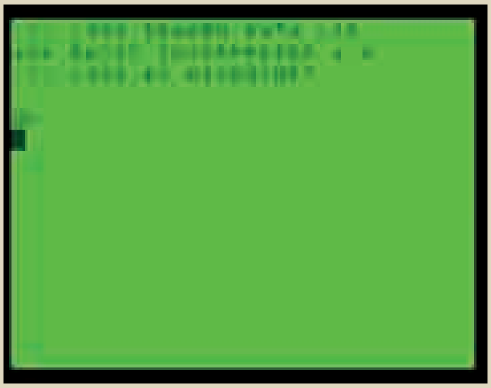
STEP TWO

You'll need to Google for the Dragon ROM files – search for sites that host MESS ROM sets. There are three files in total – the Dragon 32 ROM, the Dragon 64 ROM and the Dragon DOS ROM – but to run the vast majority of games software you only need the Dragon 32 ROM (it's usually named d32.rom). For software, visit www.dragon-archive.co.uk and register your details with the site – it's free and only takes a few seconds.



STEP THREE

The website features cassette, cartridge and disk software. For this guide we'll just deal with running the most common type, cassette games. When you've download some games and put them in the dragon32 folder (there's no need to unzip them first), return to the main MESS folder and run mamegui.exe. MESS will now run and you'll see a list of all the supported systems. You'll find the Dragon computers as a subset of Color Computer.



STEP FOUR

Providing that your Dragon ROM file is correct, you'll see that the Dragon 32 does not have a little 'no entry' sign on like the other systems. This means that it's ready to run. Double-click the icon and follow the on-screen prompts (ignore the warning about incorrect ROMs – this will appear if you haven't included the Dragon DOS ROM which is not needed for tape games). After a brief pause the bright-green BASIC screen will appear.



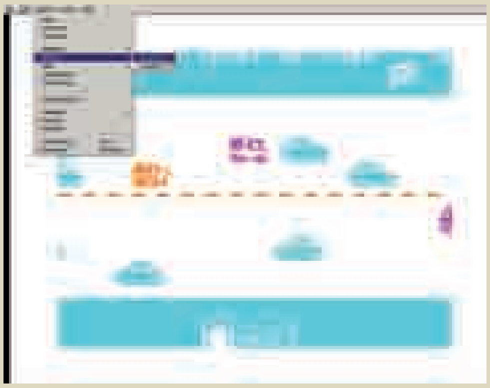
STEP FIVE

To load a game, select Devices from the menu bar at the top of the screen and click Cassette [empty slot] then Mount. Browse to your roms folder where your games are stored and select one (you will probably need to change the Files of type option to All files). Double-click your game of choice and then at the BASIC screen type CLOADM and press Enter. To speed up loading select the Throttle option from the Options menu.



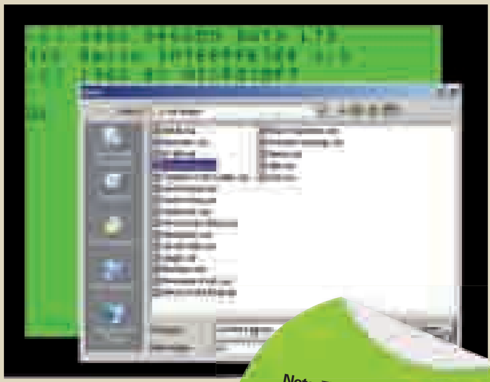
STEP SIX

If a blinking cursor appears when the game has loaded, type EXEC and press Enter to run it. If, when you try to load the game, you receive an '?FM ERROR' message then this is because the game (or the initial loader) is a BASIC program. To load this you will first need to reset the system by selecting Hard Reset from the Options menu. Then select the game again and type CLOAD instead of CLOADM, and when it loads type RUN instead of EXEC.



STEP SEVEN

Hopefully you've managed to get a Dragon game up and running (don't forget to select Throttle again once the game has loaded). Control methods vary from game to game, and you can usually choose between keyboard or joystick (this is emulated using your PC's number pad, although you can change this by selecting Joysticks from the Options menu). You can quit Dragon emulation at any time by clicking File then Exit.



STEP EIGHT

MESS has a fairly high compatibility rate, but if you experience problems running a certain game then there is an alternative emulator you can try. XRoar is a dedicated, multiplatform Dragon emulator that's available from www.6809.org.uk/dragon/xroar.shtml. XRoar is controlled using hot-key combinations (you need to press Ctrl+L to load a game for example) – see the readme file for full instructions. Note that versions of XRoar are available for the GP32 and Nintendo DS.

Note: The popular cross-platform MESS emulator is also available on the Mac, so make sure you download it if you don't have access to a PC, or indeed, an actual Dragon32. You can download the latest version from www.mess.org.

BARGAIN HUNT

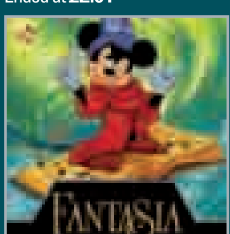
HUNT DOWN BARGAINS OR JUST DRINK UP THE LOVELINESS OF ALL THIS RETRO GOODNESS. FEAST YOUR EYES ON SIX PAGES OF THE VERY BEST THAT RETRO GAMING HAS TO OFFER…

Collecting retro games can be great fun, but you need to have a rough idea how much it's going to cost you. So here for your buying pleasure is Retro Gamer's buyer's guide. Where possible we have endeavoured to list the earliest international launch date, be it Asia, America or Europe. Prices were compiled from a variety of sources, including eBay, Japan auctions, car-boot sales, traders and general consensus. Foreign items will often be cheaper in their local country, so regional differences should be considered. Also, bear in mind that online items will often be cheaper than you will find in specialist stores. If you see an item selling for far less, good for you! We aim to help with finding those bargains, but if you see an item sold for much higher make sure you really want to purchase it. Prices fluctuate and the market sways, so there can never be a concrete listing. Bear in mind that something is worth as much as someone else is willing to pay. No one is perfect though, and we will openly admit that with over 100 different systems to list, mistakes can happen. If you spot a glaring error in our listings, please drop us an email at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and let us know about it!

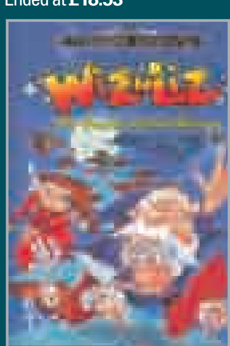
RETRO AUCTION

Retro Gamer will be sifting through countless pages of eBay and reporting on any items of interest (hardware and software) that have caught our eye. If something has sold for a staggeringly high amount of money (or lower than it normally would) you'll find them listed here.

FANTASIA
MEGA DRIVE
Normally sells for **£3.50**
Ended at **£2.01**



WIZ 'N' LIZ
MEGA DRIVE
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£18.53**



3DO



3DO GOLDSTAR
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£45+ ($83 - $111)**



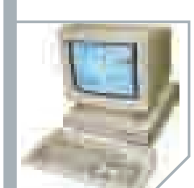
PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)
» YEAR **1993**
»» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 - £60 ($74 - $111)**



PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

While 3DO systems had much potential, there wasn't enough software support and it eventually stopped production. There were still some great games released!
- STAR CONTROL 2
- RETURN FIRE
- CRASH AND BURN

ACORN



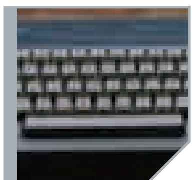
ARCHIMEDES
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) (with games)**

Early RISC-based home computer, quite powerful at the time.



ATOM
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**

Extremely old home computer by Acorn that's now hard to find.



ACORN ELECTRON
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

Budget version of the BBC home computer (below).



BBC MICRO
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**

A classic British home computer, and quite popular. Affectionately known as 'the Beeb'.
- EXILE
- ELITE
- WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST

AMSTRAD



CPC 464
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**

Early classic 8-bit home computer from Amstrad, designed to compete against the C64 and ZX Spectrum. This early model has a built in cassette tape deck. Beware the models that come with a green screen monitor!



CPC 664
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

Like the 464, except with a floppy disk drive. A short-lived model that was soon replaced by the superior 6128.



CPC 6128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25+ ($46+)**

Improved model which doubled the RAM of previous iterations. Later 'Plus' models came with a cartridge port.
- RENEGADE
- RICK DANGEROUS
- GRYZOR



GX4000
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**

Console version of the CPC Plus range, came with joypads. Limited range of games.
- BURNIN' RUBBER
- PANG
- SWITCHBLADE

APPLE



APPLE II
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+) (with games)**

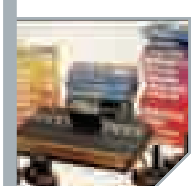
Like many early computers the Apple II was hand-built machine and sold to enthusiasts.
- KARATEKA
- ULTIMA IV
- LODE RUNNER

ATARI



400/800/600XL/XE
» YEAR **1979**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

Series of old 8-bit Atari home computers.
- DROP ZONE
- THRUST
- ZYBEX



2600 (VCS)
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+**

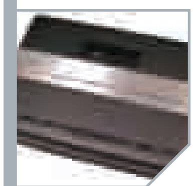
Earliest console by Atari. Various models, many with the classic wood panelling effect. Many UK gamers had their first taste of videogames on this.
- PITFALL
- ADVENTURE
- COSMIC ARK

RARITY GUIDE

👾👾👾👾👾 ROCKING HORSE SHIT
👾👾👾👾 HEN'S TEETH
👾👾👾 LUCKY FIND
👾👾 EBAY REGULAR
👾 CAR BOOT SALE BARGAIN



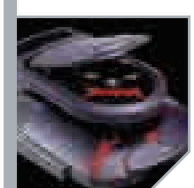
5200
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY 👾👾👾👾
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Unpopular successor to the 2600, regarded as an Atari 400 without a keyboard.
- RESCUE ON FRACTALUS
- DIG DUG
- ZAXXON



7800
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY 👾👾👾
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Handily, Atari made the 7800 backwards compatible with the ever popular 2600.
- KARATEKA
- CHOPLIFTER
- WINTER GAMES



JAGUAR
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY 👾👾
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Failed attempt to beat the PlayStation and Saturn in the console race. Few decent games. But it does have Jeff Minter's *Tempest*!
- TEMPEST 2000
- ALIEN VS PREDATOR
- BATTLESPHERE (RARE AND EXPENSIVE!)



JAGUAR CD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY 👾👾👾👾
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Rare and overpriced CD add-on for the Jaguar. Very few games, but it does look very much like a toilet seat!
- BATTLEMORPH CD
- HIGHLANDER CD
- TEMPEST 2000 MUSIC CD

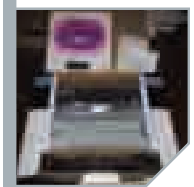


LYNX I/II (2ND IS SMALLER)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY 👾👾👾
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Powerful handheld from Atari that failed due to poor marketing and battery life.
- BLUE LIGHTNING
- CALIFORNIA GAMES
- DIRTY LARRY RENEGADE COP



ST
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY 👾👾
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) depending on model**
Atari home computer and a big rival to the Amiga. There are many different models of various specifications.
- DUNGEON MASTER
- POPULOUS
- DAMOCLES

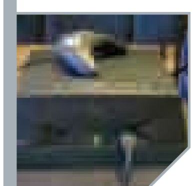
BANDAI



GUNDAM RX-78 COMPUTER
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY 👾👾👾👾👾
» PRICE **£75+ ($138+) (prices fluctuate wildly)**
Ultra rare, early Japanese games computer by Bandai. Aimed at both gamers and anime fans. Expect to pay a much higher price for a machine that's in mint condition.



PLAYDIA
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY 👾👾👾👾👾
» PRICE **£90 ($166) and upwards according to eBay**
Bizarre Japan-only console, apparently made for kids.
- SAILOR MOON
- ULTRAMAN
- DRAGON BALL Z



PIPPIN(ATMARK)
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY 👾👾👾👾👾
» PRICE **Approx £500+ ($921+)**
A strange hybrid system from Bandai and Apple. Very expensive and with very few games available. It's high price means that it's normally only sought after by collectors.
- RACING DAYS
- DRAGON BALL Z
- GUNDAM TACTICS



WONDERSWAN (B/W)
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY 👾👾👾
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



WONDERSWAN COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY 👾👾
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL
» YEAR **2000**
» RARITY 👾👾
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
Handheld system by Bandai, fairly popular. Can now be bought very cheaply, especially in Japan. Be sure to buy the SwanCrystal, which is basically an improved 'Color' model. Both colourised models can run B/W WS games.
- GUNPEY EX
- SWAN COLOSSEUM
- JUDGEMENT SILVERSWORD

COMMODORE



AMIGA500/600/1200
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY 👾👾
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) (more with games, depending on model)**
Classic and incredibly popular 16-bit home computer by Commodore, that was designed to compete against the Atari ST range. Vast array of different models, with differing specs, the Amiga 500 (with a RAM upgrade) is a particular favourite with many gamers.
- SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE
- LEMMINGS
- SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER



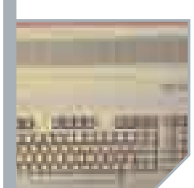
C16/PLUS 4
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY 👾👾👾
» PRICE **£15+ ($28+)**
The less well known sibling of the C64, but without the compatibility of its peers.
- TUTTI FRUTTI
- MONTY ON THE RUN
- KIKSTART



C64
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY 👾
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
One of the best selling 8-bit home computers of all time. Competed against the Spectrum and Amstrad home computers. Featured the wonderful SID sound chip that was put to amazing use by the likes of Ben Daglish and Rob Hubbard.
- WIZBALL
- MAYHEM IN MONSTERLAND
- PARADROID



C64 GS (GAMES SYSTEM)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY 👾👾👾👾
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Commodore's cartridge-based machine that tried to take on both Nintendo and Sega. Sadly failed due to a lack of support from most publishers.
- PANG
- NAVY SEALS
- BATTLE COMMAND

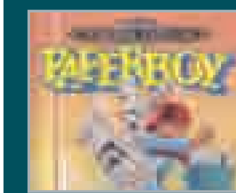


C128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY 👾👾👾
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Three machines (CPM, C64 and C128) in one box. Specialised software is relatively small in number.



CDTV
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY 👾👾👾👾
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Commodore aimed for the 'every home should have one' market and missed by a country

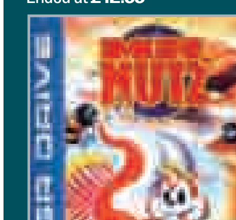
PAPERBOY
MEGA DRIVE
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **£2.01**



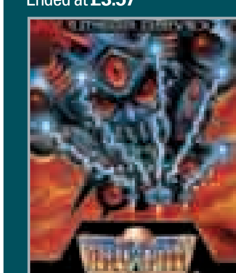
THE CHAOS ENGINE
MEGA DRIVE
Normally sells for **£7**
Ended at **£15.65**



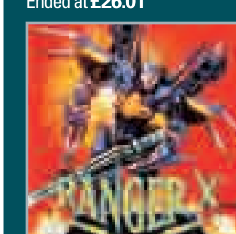
MR NUTZ
Mega Drive
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **£12.33**



TRUXTON
MEGA DRIVE
Normally sells for **£12**
Ended at **£3.57**



RANGER X
MEGA DRIVE
Normally sells for **£15**
Ended at **£26.01**



mile. A curious mixture of games and educational material.



CD32
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
CD-based console that followed on from the experimental CDTV. Sometimes described as a consolised Amiga 1200 with CD drive. Despite featuring some extremely impressive games, the majority failed to improve on their 500 and 1200 counterparts.
- EXILE
- SIMON THE SORCERER
- ALIEN BREED 3D



VIC-20
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) based on condition/extras**
The computer that established Commodore brand.
- HELLGATE
- SERPENTINE
- SUPER SMASH

FUJITSU



FUJITSU FM COMPUTERS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+)**
Early Nineties home computers by Fujitsu.



FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200+ ($368+)**
A legendary console, which contains both a CD and disk drive. Based on Fujitsu's old FM Towns computers, and mostly backwards compatible with the majority of games. Very expensive, (especially if you find a machine in mint condition), but with a lot of chic!
- ZAK MC KRAKEN
- TATSUJIN OU
- SCAVENGER 4

MISCELLANEOUS



BALLY ASTROCADE
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Early videogame system that used interchangeable cartridges, developed by the Bally games division at Midway Games.
- GATE ESCAPE
- ICBM ATTACK
- TREASURE COVE



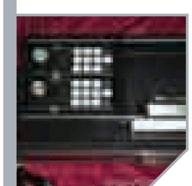
BARCODE BATTLER
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($18)**
Handheld LCD game, where you must swipe barcoded cards (or barcodes taken from soup packets!) to gather stats, and then battle against someone else who swiped barcodes. We're not making this up…
– Kit Kat (Dark Chocolate)
– Milky Way
– Cadbury's Creme Egg



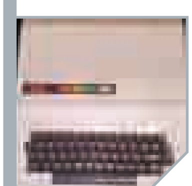
CASIO LOOPY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
More inanity from the land of the rising sun. This is a console designed especially for female gamers and it even allows stickers to be printed out… Casio hoped it would do better than their failed PV-1000 console released in 1983.



FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F
» YEAR **1976**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) (from the USA)**
The first commercially released console that used programmable cartridges. A real piece of history. Despite this, it's surprisingly cheap to purchase (although importing from the US may cost a fair amount).



COLECOVISION
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) standalone**
Coleco's third generation videogame system. Quite a few decent games, and considering its age it's a fairly powerful machine. Many of its arcade conversions were considered superior to the other systems on the market.
-CONGO BONGO
- SMURPH RESCUE
- CABBAGE PATCH KIDS



DRAGON 32/64
» YEAR **1982/3**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15) (very cheap on eBay)**
Early British home computer that tried to cash in on the early Eighties boom. Short-lived though quite popular. The 64 model was released roughly a year after the 32.
- GRID RUNNER
- DEVIL ASSAULT
- CAVE FIGHTER



ARCADIA 2001
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Failed console by Emerson, which had numerous different clones released as well.
- FUNKY FISH
- JUNGLER
- ROBOT KILLER



EPOCH CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Obscure early Japanese console, which in 1983 had a budget 'Junior' model released.



EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Epoch's successor to the Cassette Vision, which was also marketed in Europe under the Yeno label. Apparently it only had around 30 games released for it.



INTELLIVISION
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40+ ($74+) depending on extras**
Developed by Mattel, the system was revolutionary. It was the first console to be technically 16-bit, go online (to download games), and it featured voice synthesis. Today it still has a strong retro following.
- FROG BOG
- ARMOR BATTLE
- LOCK 'N' CHASE



ODYSSEY
» YEAR **1972**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
The original home videogame console, even before Atari got in on the act! Created by Ralph Baer, this is the ultimate piece of gaming history. Fortunately, it can be purchased relatively cheaply.



ORIC-1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
The Oric-1 was a highly underrated 8-bit bit home computer created by Oric Products International. Despite having many games that were arguably superior to those on the Spectrum it was sadly unable to compete with the rival machine's high sales.
- XENON1
- INSECT INSANITY
- RAT SPLAT



PLAYSTATION
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on condition/model**
Another attempt by Sony to enter the videogame hardware market (after the MSX), this time they took over the market. There are countless undocumented yet excellent PS games. Was later re-released as the PSOne, which is more expensive, but looks much nicer in design.
- CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
- FINAL FANTASY VII
- RIDGE RACER



SAM COUPE
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 - £200 ($92 - $368) (allegedly for a mint system)**
Originally developed by Miles Gordon Technology in Swansea, the Sam Coupe was a unique 8-bit British home computer which didn't fare very well. It could even emulate the 48K Speccy to a degree.
- DEFENDERS OF THE EARTH
- ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE ROBOT MONSTERS
- PRINCE OF PERSIA



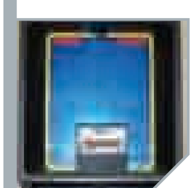
SUPERVISION
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Marketed by several different companies, this was essentially a cut-price competitor to the monochrome Game Boy. Unsurprisingly, it was not manufactured for very long and is now hard to find.



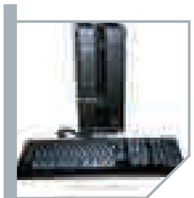
TIGER ELEC. GAME.COM
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Attempt by Tiger Electronics to compete against the Game Boy.
- RESIDENT EVIL 2
- SONIC JAM
- DUKE NUKEM 3D



TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)
» YEAR **1983/4**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Series of old computers by Tomy.

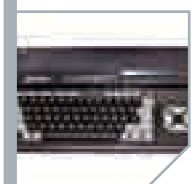


VECTREX (MB/GCE)
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
The only home system ever to come with a vector display, enabling true vector graphics.
- SPACE WAR
- SPINBALL
- HYPERCHASE

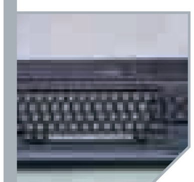


X68000
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90+ ($166+)**
Home computer by Sharp, released only in Japan. Famous for its arcade ports.
- CASTLEVANIA CHRONICLES
- STREET FIGHTER 2
- FINAL FIGHT

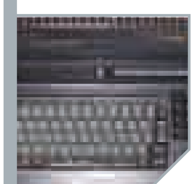
MSX



MSX 1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
An early attempt to create a standard gaming platform, fairly common in the UK.
- PENGUIN ADVENTURE
- KNIGHTMARE
- THE GOONIES



MSX 2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Updated and more powerful version of the MSX, very popular in Holland and Brazil where even today some excellent homebrew games are developed.
- METAL GEAR 2
- ALESTE 2
- VAMPIRE KILLER

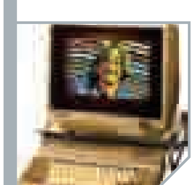


MSX 2+
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Another hardware update that proved to be very popular in Holland.
- SPACE MANBOW
- GOLVELLIUS 2
- F1 SPIRIT 3D SPECIAL



MSX TURBO R
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
A final and not very popular hardware update, that was virtually exclusive to Japan.
- FRAY
- PRINCESS MAKER
- ILLUSION CITY

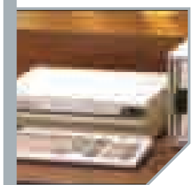
NEC



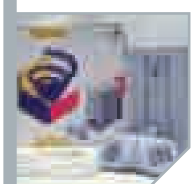
PC-6### (ALSO MK II)
» YEAR **1984 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) depending on model**
Quite old 6000 series of home computers by NEC, with a lot of cool Japanese games for it. Released in the US as the NEC Trek. Be careful of shipping prices.



PC-8801
» YEAR **1981 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) (cheap on Yahoo! Japan)**
Old computer series by NEC, with several different models over the years. Has a massive roster of cool games, including the original *Silpheed*. While very cheap to buy online from Japan, shipping is expensive.



PC-9801
» YEAR **1983 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) (cheap on Yahoo! Japan)**
Another home computer series by NEC, again with many great games. Laptop versions also exist. Most games by Falcom are worth watching out for.



PCFX
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) prices can fluctuate**
32-bit tower console by NEC, resembles a PC. Released in Japan only, had software support until 1998. Only a few action titles. Apparently, it also had quite a bit of hentai on it.
- LAST IMPERIAL PRINCE
- CHOUJIN HEIKI ZEROIGAR (SHMUP)
- ZENKI FX (FIGHTER)



PC-ENGINE
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£55 ($101)**
Classic piece of Japanese hardware from NEC which features many excellent arcade ports and a few exclusives. The CoreGrafx system is basically a PC-Engine with AV output.



PC-ENGINE GT
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70+ ($129+)**
Portable handheld version of the Japanese PC-Engine that played all Japanese Hu-Cards.



TURBO GRAFX-16
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
American version of the PC-Engine. It has territory lockout, so the two system's Hu-Cards are not mutually compatible.



TURBO EXPRESS
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) (massive fluctuations)**
Portable handheld version of the American Turbo Grafx-16.
- BONK/PC KID SERIES
- BLOODY WOLF
- NINJA SPIRIT



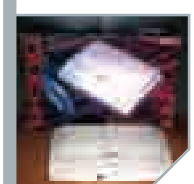
SUPER GRAFX
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147) (prices can fluctuate)**
Meant to be the successor to the original PC-Engine, but sadly failed due to lack of games. It is backwards compatible, but only had 6 games specifically released for it.
- ALDYNES
- DARIUS PLUS
- GHOULS AND GHOSTS



PCE CD-ROM/ TURBO GRAFX CD
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
CD-ROM add-on for the PCE and TG16, released in 1988 and 1989. It has no region lockout.



PCE DUO/TURBO DUO
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£120 ($221)**
System that combines the PCE/TG16 with its CD add-on. Released in both Japan and America in 1991 and 1992. The CD games still have no region lockout.

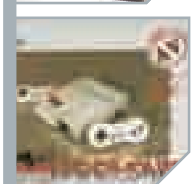


DUO-R
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Stripped down white version of the PCE Duo, without headphone port. Later in 1994 a Duo-RX version was released, slightly blue in colour and came with a 6 button control pad.
- DRACULA X
- SHUBIBINMAN 3
- LORDS OF THUNDER

NINTENDO



FAMICOM
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£60 ($111)**
Nintendo's first foray into the home console market, with over a 1000 games to choose from!



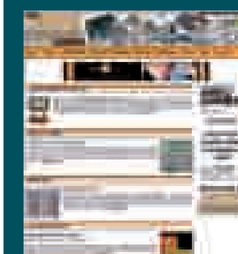
FAMICOM AV
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
A cheaper remodelled version of the Famicom, now with AV output.



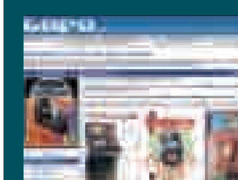
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Nintendo's attempt to bring cheap rewritable disk-based gaming to the masses. Be warned,

RETRO GAMING SITES

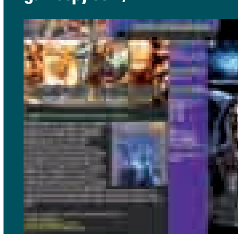
THE MEAN MACHINES ARCHIVE
Slowly, but ever so surely The Mean Machines Archive is turning into one of the greatest fansites on the internet, and it's nothing to do with the fact that the site's owner is a regular contributor to Retro Gamer... All the Mean Machines team have now been interviewed and you can read all the juicy gossip that never appeared in Retro Gamer 31.
www.meanmachinesmag.co.uk



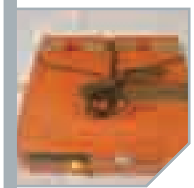
THE ARCADE FLYERS ARCHIVE
Fans of classic art from yesteryear should find the excellent Arcade Flyers Archive a great nostalgic blast. In fact, we personally guarantee* that if you visit and don't get your nostalgia gland stimulated, we'll give you a free subscription. *We are of course joking. Tch.
http://arcadeflyers.com/



THE METROID DATABASE
Did you know that it's *Metroid*'s 20th birthday this year? You didn't? Well that's because you obviously haven't visited The Metroid Database. Every single game in the series, from Nes to GameCube (yes we know it's on the Wii, but hasn't come out yet so doesn't count) is included and the passionate forum is filled with helpful fans.
http://mdb.classicgaming.gamespy.com/



the drive belts break very easily.

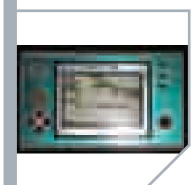


SHARP FAMICOM TWIN

» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**

Combined Famicom and Disk System, by Sharp.

- OTOCKY
- NAZO NO MURASAMEJOU
- PATLABOR



GAME&WATCH

» YEAR **1980-1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£1+ ($2+)**

Series of handheld LCD games that were created by the legendary Gunpei Yoko.



GAME BOY B/W

» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($9)**

Nintendo's original handheld portable, with interchangeable cartridges. Despite it's age, and monochrome display, there are many excellent classic GB games.

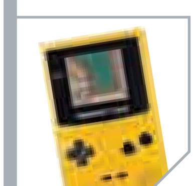


GAME BOY POCKET

» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15)**

A smaller and more compact GB, with improved screen. A Japanese version with built-in light was released and sells for a much higher price.

- SUPER MARIO LAND
- TETRIS
- POKÉMON



GAME BOY COLOR

» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£12 ($22)**

Colour-based version of the classic GB. Backwards compatible, but it also has several exclusive games that were rather special.

- METAL GEAR SOLID: GHOST BABEL
- RESIDENT EVIL GAIDEN
- HARVEST MOON 3



GAME BOY ADVANCE

» YEAR **2001**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**



N64

» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

Nintendo's last cartridge based console, competitor to the PlayStation and Saturn. Has several highly sought after classics. Some games (like *Donkey Kong*) require the RAM expansion pack and wouldn't run without it.

- SUPER MARIO 64
- PILOTWINGS 64
- BLAST CORPS



N64 DD

» YEAR **1999**
» » RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**

Another attempt by Nintendo to incorporate disc media with one of their cartridge-based consoles. Expensive and very few games were released.

- F-ZERO EXPANSION KIT
- MARIO ARTIST SERIES
- DOSHIN THE GIANT



NES (TOASTER)

» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**

The Western version of the Famicom, popular the world over. Plenty of great Nintendo classics to choose from, and very cheap too.



NES (DOG BONE)

» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**

Remodelled and improved version of the traditional NES. Region lockout was also removed, meaning all 72 pin based NES games work.

- METROID
- THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
- SUPER MARIO BROS. 3



SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)

» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

Nintendo's successor to the NES, and one of their most popular machines. A retro staple with a fantastic selection of games.



SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JPN)

» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**

Cheaper and redesigned SNES.

- SUPER METROID
- SECRET OF MANA
- SUPER MARIO WORLD



VIRTUAL BOY

» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**

Nintendo's failed attempt at a pseudo Virtual Reality games system. Quite a novelty as there is nothing else like it. Be warned though, as many gamers have complained that the machine gives them headaches – never a good thing.

- INSMOUSE NO YAKATA (HP LOVECRAFT INSPIRED FPS)
- WARIO LAND
- RED ALARM

PHILIPS



CD-I 205/210/220

» YEAR **from1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

Unique system by Philips.The 200 series consists of front loading systems, with each one having slightly different specifications.



CD-I 450/500

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) (more with DVC)**

Consolised version of previous models, with the latter 500 series featuring an integrated DVC.

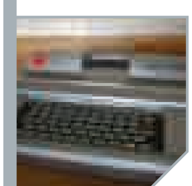
- BURN CYCLE
- HOTEL MARIO



VIDEOPAC G7000

» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

Popular across the world (especially Brazil and Holland) and known also as the 'Odyssey 2'.



VIDEOPAC G7400

» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

A successor to the G7000, that was backwards compatible.

- QUEST FOR RINGS
- PICKAXE PETE
- MUNCHKIN

SEGA



32X

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) (with leads)**

Failed Mega Drive add-on, designed to enhance it's capabilities.

- KNUCKLES CHAOTIX
- KOLIBRI
- DARXIDE



DREAMCAST

» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46) depending on extras**

Sega's final hardware release. No gamer should be without it. Amazing official roster of games, plus it can emulate older systems.

- SHENMUE
- CRAZY TAXI
- REZ

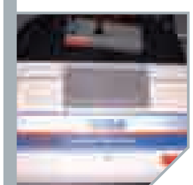


GAME GEAR

» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28) more with extras**

Handheld by Sega, designed to compete against the Game Boy. Low battery life, but effectively a portable Master System. Could also be used as a TV (as shown here).

- SHINOBI 2
- COLUMNS
- TV TUNER



SG-1000 (PLUS THE MARK II AND III)

» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20-£50 ($37 - $$92)**

Sega's first console, and a piece of history! The Mark III model would later be redesigned to become the Master System. Like the Japanese Famicom, it's much nicer than the UK version.



SC-3000

» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £50 ($92)**

Computer equivalent of the SG-1000, also by Sega. Was popular in Australia and other ex-colonies. Mutually compatible with the SG-1000 as well.



MASTER SYSTEM I/II

» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) with leads etc.**

Popular Sega 8-bit console, which competed against the NES. Adapted from previous systems.

- PHANTASY STAR
- WONDER BOY 3: DRAGON'S TRAP
- CALIFORNIA GAMES



AMSTRAD MEGA PC

» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) (according to eBay)**

A strange hybrid between an Amstrad PC and a Mega Drive. A nice collectable oddity, though according to past eBay auctions, not a high seller.



TERADRIVE

» YEAR **1991**
» » RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £100 ($184)**

Another Mega Drive computer

hybrid. Released earlier than the Amstrad hybrid, these systems have no connection. Due to being exclusive to Japan, they are seldom seen in the wild. Likely to be very expensive if you are able to find one.



MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II
» YEAR **1989+**
» RARITY
» » PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on model**
The big daddy, Sega's most successful console and a retro classic.

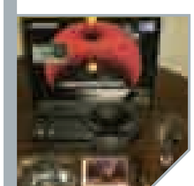


GENESIS 3
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**
Developed by Majesco. This third, cut-down model is rarer and has some compatibility issues. USA only.



NOMAD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Handheld Mega Drive. Pricey, low battery life and some compatibility problems.

- RANGER-X
- THUNDER FORCE IV
- COMIX ZONE



MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+) depending on system**
CDX/Xeye
A series of different hybrid MD and MCD systems, released in the three main territories.



MEGA CD (SCD) I/II
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+) depending on system**
Sega's CD add-on for the Mega Drive. Despite heavy criticism, has many excellent games.

- POPFUL MAIL
- SNATCHER
- SONIC CD



PICO
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) (more with games)**
Toy computer released for young children. The games come in nice storybook style boxes.

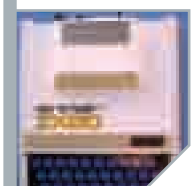
- SONIC'S GAMEWORLD
- ECCO JR. AND THE GREAT OCEAN HUNT
- THE LION KING: ADVENTURES AT PRIDE ROCK



SATURN
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Sega's competition against the PlayStation and N64. A real 2D powerhouse, that despite an amazing catalogue of games never really took off.

- SATURN BOMBERMAN
- GUARDIAN HEROES
- DRAGON FORCE

SINCLAIR

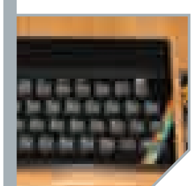


ZX-80
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200 ($368) Apparently if boxed and mint**
Very early British home computer from Sinclair. Low capability meant limited gaming possibilities. Now extremely hard to get hold of.



ZX-81
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) if mint**
Improved home computer from Sinclair, with black and white ASCII graphics. Not as hard to source as a ZX-80, but still commands a respectable price.

- 3D MONSTER MAZE
- MAZOGS
-SABOTAGE



ZX SPECTRUM 48K
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



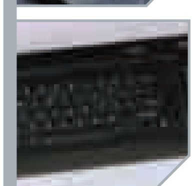
ZX SPECTRUM 128K
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**



ZX SPECTRUM
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



ZX SPECTRUM +2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



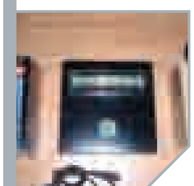
ZX SPECTRUM +3
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
The British classic loved by many. A vast improvement over previous Sinclair computers, it was normally compared against the C64 and Amstrad home computers, which in turn caused many playground arguments over who had the better machine.

- HEAD OVER HEELS
- 3D DEATHCHASE
- SKOOL DAZE

SNK

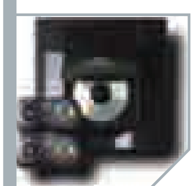


NEOGEO AES
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
High powered home system by SNK. Features many high quality arcade games. Sadly, many titles are now ridiculously expensive to purchase.



NEOGEO MVS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) (multi-slot systems cost more)**
High powered arcade system by SNK, which many people prefer over the home based AES due to lower pricing of games. (The majority of NeoGeo titles appeared on both systems, or alternatively can be converted).

- METAL SLUG
- KING OF FIGHTERS 96
- WAKU WAKU 7

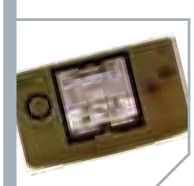


NEOGEO CD
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184) varies**



NEOGEO CDZ
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80+ ($147+)**
CD-based NeoGeo systems, an attempt by SNK to lower the cost of NeoGeo games. The CDZ is cheaper and has slightly improved loading times. Most CD titles are ports from the AES/MVS.

- VIEWPOINT
- AGGRESSORS OF DARK COMBAT
- SAMURAI SHOWDOWN RPG



NEOGEO POCKET (B/W)
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



NEOGEO POCKET COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**
Handheld NeoGeo systems by SNK, that sadly failed to compete with the Game Boy, despite featuring some great games. Still a wonderful little system though. Be sure to buy the later colour screen model.

- FASELEI!
- CARD FIGHTERS (CAPCOM/SNK)
- MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM (CAP VS SNK)

RETRO GAMING SITES

ACORN ELECTRON WORLD
No, it's not a website about gigantic Oak trees that have been spliced with electricity, it's a website that's actually devoted to everyone's favourite 8-bit computer that still hasn't appeared on our system cover strap yet. Does it deserve to be there though? Write in and let's hear your demands.
http://old-computers.com/news/default.asp



COMMODORE16.COM
Aaaarggh. It's happened again. There we were, walking down Bournemouth high street and minding our own business when a man dressed in a brown robe walked in front of us, waved his arm and said, "These are not the droids you're looking for." Waking up we'd found that we'd written another plug for this fantastic Commodore16 site. How does this keep happening to us?
www.commodore16.com



RADIO SEGA
We've mentioned it countless times before, but let's face it, what could be better than listening to classic Sega tunes 24-7? Nothing that's what. And before everyone gets up in arms and send us letters about how amazing the SID chip was just remember this. We love all retro game music equally. We just like it more if it's by Sega.
www.radiosega.net



Special thanks to **lofi-gaming-org.uk** who supplied several of our screenshots

retro GAMER

NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE 24 MAY 2007

LOAD 38

THE DEFINITIVE…

FROGGER

IT'S BEEN A MASSIVE 25 YEARS IN THE MAKING, BUT STUART CAMPBELL FINALLY HAS THE TIME TO TELL THE STORY OF GAMING'S MOST POPULAR FROG…







RETROINSPECTION…

2007 marks the 20th year since Nintendo's 8-bit console was released in the UK. Retro Gamer looks back at its impact on the videogame industry

OTHER EXCITING FEATURES…

- The boys at Free Radical spill the secrets of Rare's 64-bit hit *GoldenEye*
- Join Retro Gamer in the first of a two-part series that charts the history of SNK
- Sid Meier sticks on an eye patch, grabs a bottle of rum and talks to us about *Pirates!*
- Martyn Carroll discovers how to stuff a *Dragon's Lair* coin-op into a humble Spectrum

eMag



INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM

He's been served chilled monkey brains, ridden an out-of-control mine cart and fought an ancient cult, but will the whipped wonder be able to retrieve the Shankara stones? Oh come on, this is Indiana Jones we're talking about. Didn't you see the film?



SCREEN 1
Is this the end of our intrepid adventurer? Caught between a rock and a hard place… all right, a Thuggee guard and Mola Ram, Indy seems doomed to a watery death.



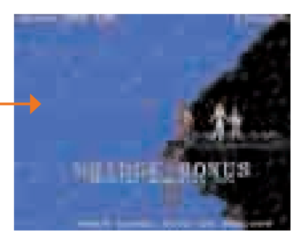
SCREEN 2
Obviously having bigger stones than the ones he's trying to save, Indy raises his sword high above his head and threatens to send everyone plummeting into the gorge below.



SCREEN 3
Holy crap! He wasn't bluffing. As the rope bridge breaks in half, both Mola Ram and his devoted follower begin their descent. Indy desperately tries to grab on to the disintegrating bridge…



SCREEN 4
Indy hangs on for dear life while Mola Ram disappears off the bottom of the screen. With the stones safely in his possession, Jones climbs up the broken ladder.



SCREEN 5
Success. The stones are saved, and a bruised and battered Indy is once again reunited with his friends – only to discover that his love interest is leaving him for Steven Spielberg. Gutted.